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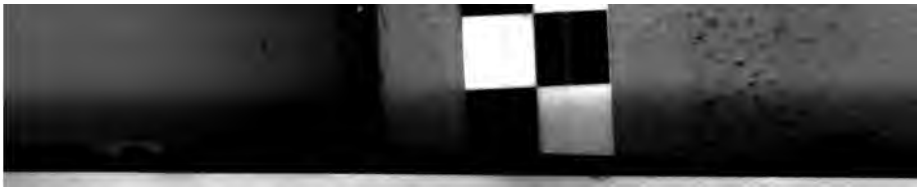

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Smith, R.:
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We shouted back suitable acknowledgments and resumed our journey

[Page 20]

THE WILD WHITE WOODS

OR

A Winter Camp on the Canada Line

BY

RUSSELL D. SMITH

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK

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[*Page 20*]

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THE WILD WHITE WOODS

CHAPTER I

UNSHACKLED

Indian summer lay brooding over the little Vermont valley, lying far up towards the Canadian boundary-line. Many a comfortable farm and homestead lay stretched up the slopes around us in quiet beauty—homes of early settlers—joined one to another in orderly array—pasture, tillage and woodlot,—and extended their boundaries higher and higher until they reached the scanty timber line yet remaining on the mountain tops. To the westward a smiling prospect spread away to the misty horizon where, shut off from us by a range of hills, lay the big lake, Champlain.

Worth had taken off his hat to cool his heated head. That hat would be called a Stetson in the west, and it looked well on him, albeit it was

somewhat battered and frayed about the edges. Worth was a fine-looking fellow in any sort of dress, even in that of a hobo, as he appeared now, but at home he was Ellsworth Hurd, son of old Daniel Hurd of Mountaindale, and a rich man. He and I had graduated from the Peabody Academy in that town just two months before, and were now on a business and pleasure trip of long standing arrangement between us. That is, his share of it was pleasure, and mine was business. I was none too well fixed, and was bent on making some money for myself, so we were bound for the Vermont and Canadian woods on a hunting and trapping expedition to last all winter.

Worth's young sister, Edith Mary, for whom I entertained a secret adoration, saw us off. She had kissed her brother and shaken my hand indifferently when we parted, but I looked back oftener than Worth did. We had ridden by rail to Hallebury, about fifty miles, where we were to take the stage for East Corinth. Our duffle, consisting of guns, provisions, maps of various sizes, pots, pans and other impedimenta were packed snugly in two gigantic canvas bags, which we now regarded with an evil

eye. We reached Hallebury, and at once trudged over to the general store kept by old Silas Worden with whom Worth had some previous acquaintance. We wished to gather some points of importance on the general conduct of our enterprise after leaving East Corinth, for neither of us was at all sure of our best method of procedure beyond that point.

Silas's store was almost empty, and this suited us as we did not wish everyone in that village to know of our project. Seizing an opportunity we greeted the old man, who received us most heartily, and we duly explained our errand. We were surprised to see the old fellow turn his big square-framed glasses full upon us, and then to open wide a toothless mouth in a silent grin. He enjoyed our communication in this manner for some moments, to our discomfiture, and then exclaimed, "What's that? A winter in the woods, hey? Sounds dreary, I tell you. I wouldn't want to be araound with you folks for no money. Take my advice and quit sech nonsense. It mought be a success from a pecun'ry point o' view, but then, land sakes! jest wait ontil the white blanket is spread over things, so's you can't tell which from t'other.

Wait, I tell yer, ontil the frost comes good and hard, and you hear the woods snap and crack, and the trees split open, it'll be so durned cold. You'll wake up in the morning stiff'rn a dead woodchuck, and then you'll be a-wishin' you were back to hum a-eatin' buckwheat cakes and boiled sugar."

This harangue certainly was not encouraging, and for a moment we were nonplussed. However, Worth soon found his voice, and said: "It's a matter of necessity almost, Mr. Worden. My friend here has got to find work to do, and for that matter, so have I. Father won't want me around all winter eating my head off."

"Yes, that is the way it stands," said I, "and the question is, at least for me, whether there is any money in the peltry business—that is, enough to make it worth while braving a hard season in the woods to get it."

Silas's face grew serious as he looked at us and saw that we were in earnest, and he stroked his long gray beard reflectively. After a pause he said, "Loggin' crews make out all right in the woods in the winter, but then they have some place to stay where they kin git warm. Where you think o' goin'?"

"We have not decided; some place where the fur is. Perhaps over the mountain a-ways, near Camel's Hump," I replied.

"Sho, don't you do it. I only got six minks from there all last winter. It wouldn't pay ye, not a bit. 'Sides, you wouldn't have any place to stay—nothin' 'tall in the woods there. You'd have to put up a good shack, or ye'd freeze to death."

"It's thirteen miles to the Hump, Mr. Worden, and woods for half the way," suggested Worth. "I should think fur could be got there if anyone looked well for it."

"Not twice't thirteen miles will take ye where pelts are a-plenty, and then you'd have to take a mountain o' traps with ye. Lemme see, have either of you fellers ever been over Averil way?"

We had heard of the Averil Lakes—there were two of them, Big and Little Averil, which were about sixty miles as the crow flies from where we stood, beyond the mountains in the wilderness bordering Canada. Loaded down as we were, it seemed a tremendous distance to us,—an almost impossible journey to make.

Old Silas noticed our looks of consternation

and smiled grimly. "If ye reely want to trap, pack up your duds, git aboard the stage and go as far as she goes, and then foot it over the timber roads to Big Averil Lake. You won't find nobody there. There was a timberin' gang in there 'bout four, five years ago, but they didn't cut much to speak on; too far yit to handle timber, so they give it up."

"Is there a camp there?" I inquired.

"They had a log camp for the cutters, and I think they had a saw there, too, so there must be a haouse for the saw men. They should be there yit. If they hain't, there's slabs and boards enough lyin' araound to build ye a haouse, I bet ye."

"How about the trapping," asked Worth, "is it good for much?"

"In the old times they was. I ricollect, father, he often said he saw moose in them woods more'n oncet, and naow you have to go to Canady to see airy moose. But as for fur pelts, you can't go nowheres to beat it. Not that you'll come back rich, boys, but if you go there and work hard and have good weather, I promise ye some good hard dollars in the spring for what ye bring back."

At this moment we were interrupted by the entrance into the store of two women, who engaged Mr. Worden's attention so completely that, after thanking him for his information, we withdrew and returned to the vicinity of our bags on the store porch.

"Well, what do you think of it?" spoke up Worth. "Silas gave us the gist of the matter, backwards and forwards. Are you still bent on going?"

"More than ever," said I promptly. "The main thing is the trapping and Mr. Worden spoke well of that. The weather, I think, we can stand. A Canadian winter is not such a great thing; many hundreds of settlers have stood it and are doing so yet. So why can't we?"

"True enough," responded Worth, "we can put up with it, without doubt. To Averil we go then. What say?" We shook hands on the agreement with much ceremony.

Before the stage drove up old Silas came out and hovered about asking many shrewd questions and proffering good advice.

We thanked him for his kindness and promised to give him the first chance to buy our pelts in the spring, if we had any to sell.

Soon after the stage drove up with one passenger in it, bound for East Corinth, and we clambered into the back seat, the driver making room for our bags beside him. The guns were deposited on the floor, lengthwise under the seats and the passenger, an old Quaker, eyed them apprehensively.

"Friends," he said at length, quaveringly, "are them carnal weepons loaded?"

We assured him that they were not.

"Where be thee goin'?" he asked again, "Huntin'?"

"Trapping," replied Worth briefly.

"Swappin'?" inquired the Quaker, putting his hand to his ear.

"Trapping," shouted Worth again.

"Wall, I want to know! Where be thee goin' trappin'?"

"Over to the lakes," yelled Worth. This was somewhat indefinite considering that lakes are as thick in Vermont as holes in a honeycomb, but it seemed to satisfy the Quaker for a time.

"What may be the name of the lake, my friend; will thee kindly inform me?" he asked after a long pause.

"Lake Mumbogumbo," roared Worth, wrathfully.

The Quaker again put his hands to his head as though his brains pained him, and the stage driver grinned sympathetically.

"You're going beyond East Corinth, I reckon?" he said, putting a question on his own account.

"Yes, a good ways beyond."

"Fur animiles not very plenty around East Corinth,—Canady's the place to git 'em."

Worth nodded assent, tired of answering these endless queries, and I removed the guns a little out of the way of the Quaker, who did not seem to relish their proximity. After a short pause, the latter addressed Worth again.

"Thee has a large load to carry and I trust thee will get to thy destination safely. When thee comes back in the spring I would like to see thy furs."

Worth assured him that, if it was a possible thing, the furs would be placed before him at once on our return, but expressed the fear that they might not be so numerous that they would fatigue his eyes to gaze upon them.

The Quaker caught most of this speech in

spite of his defective hearing, and looking keenly from one to the other of us, answered gravely: "Thee both have good determined faces. I am sure thee will get the furs. It would be a pity to undergo hardships and get no return for thy labors."

This kindly remark changed our opinion of him at once and we thanked him warmly for his good wishes. Our journey to East Corinth occupied most of the day, the stage stopping at almost every house along the road to leave mail matter, or a package or two, and receiving in return a commission of some kind to execute at either end of the route. We spent the night there at the hotel. Before us was a seven-mile walk over a rough road to Green River: there was no stage. At that village our real journey was to begin. We left East Corinth at sunrise and tramped for several hours along the dusty road. We hoped to hire some conveyance at Green River to carry us towards Averil as far as we should be able to bargain and pay for. On reaching the village, we inquired of the postmaster about a rig. He directed us to the general store. The storekeeper kept a small hotel, besides running a livery stable. The

worthy man chewed a toothpick reflectively as he sized us up and cast a casual glance over our outfit.

"Want to go to Averil, gents? Kinder tall travelin', some of it, and no rig you kin hire'll git yer through there. Big woods, ye know. Thar's a hoss I kin let ye have though, reasonable, an' a light wagon. Ye got eight mile to go where ye turn out o' the rhud an' to that air pint I'll charge ye two dollars."

This seemed fair and we closed with him at once, requesting him in his capacity as storekeeper to sell us an axe which we had forgotten. As a hotelkeeper, we asked him to furnish us with a meal, for we were hungry. Furthermore, as a liveryman, we desired to have his conveyance standing before the door promptly at the conclusion of our repast. To all of these demands on his capabilities, he agreed with the utmost sang-froid.

"I believe that fellow does a business in embalming and undertaking, and any old thing that folks could possibly ask him for," grumbled Worth as we walked to the little room in the rear of the store, which served as a dining-room. Matters looked like that to me also; nevertheless

the man knew some of his business well, at any rate, for the dinner was good and bountiful, and as it was probably our last formal meal we did ample justice to it. At its conclusion, we emerged from the store and found the light wagon, with our bags and guns packed snugly therein, standing in front of the place. An old horse was attached to it and a youth who looked like the landlord's son held the reins. He at once confirmed our supposition by informing us that "pap had tole him to take us to the schoolhaouse down the rhud a piece, and there he was to drap us."

"Why the schoolhouse, son?" inquired Worth, as he climbed into the front seat beside the driver; while I took the back seat with the bags and guns.

" 'Cause the schoolhaouse is jes' where ye'll have to turn out to go to Averil, an' the wagon can't go no further."

"Bad road, eh?" remarked Worth.

"No road 'tall. Only a timber trail and that's all ruts and hollers; break a wagon all to pieces to go over it."

"How far is it to Averil?" I asked.

"Don' know. Long ways, I guess; I hain't never been there."

"That's a cheerful prospect," commented Worth. "We must do or die this trip, that's evident."

CHAPTER II

THE SCHOOL-TEACHER

On our way to the schoolhouse the boy beguiled us with entertaining stories of hunting and fishing on the edge of the Averil woods; but as a contrast he drew a dark picture of the depths of the forest which, according to his view, was inhabited chiefly by wolves, bears, and the ghosts of departed warriors who were always on the lookout for stray travelers like ourselves.

When we got to the turning-off point, eight miles from Green River, we saw standing beside the road the little red schoolhouse, and near it a dwelling of rough boards. In this house, the boy informed us, the school-teacher lived with a farmer's family. We thought we would stop here to see about carrying in with us a crock of butter, and also to get directions for our journey through the woods.

After helping us place our duffle on the ground, the boy drove off, turning round every

few minutes to wave us a cheerful good-bye, until he was out of sight. We directed our steps to the door of the farmhouse, but our way was barred by a huge dog which growled at us from a shed, and showed a formidable set of teeth. While we were debating how to get past this barrier, a clear voice called to the dog from a kitchen window, and the door opened, disclosing a remarkably pretty young woman, who came out on the steps. We took off our hats.

"The dog won't hurt you," she called out. "Come here, Rove, haven't you any manners?"

"We have stopped to inquire if we can buy some butter here and to ask our way through the woods," said Worth, respectfully.

"Where are you going?" asked the girl, looking steadily at us.

"To Averil Lakes," replied my comrade.

"To the lakes?" repeated the girl. "That would be a difficult road to describe to you. They are thirty miles from here, and the woods extend all the way. There is only a timber road and that is passable for teams only in the winter. Are you going to walk?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Worth, "and we have some sizable bundles to carry, too. If

we can get the general direction, I think we will be able to make the journey without much trouble."

The young lady walked to the front of the house and inspected our baggage, axe, guns and so forth in the road, and gave a merry laugh.

"You are surely going to make a stay of it, to judge by your baggage. You will have some trouble to carry all that over the trail. Where are you going to stop when you get to the lakes?"

We were pleased to see that she took an interest in our undertaking.

"We understand there is a camp there and thought we could fix it up so as to be able to stay all winter," I answered, trying to get in a word.

"There is a boarding house there," answered the girl quietly.

"A boarding house!" I echoed. "What in the world would a boarding house be doing there? I thought it was very wild at the lakes."

"That is what they call it. It is really a rough boarded house with a loft where the men lived who ran the sawmill. Since the mill stopped work, the place has been deserted. It is wild enough there as you will find."

"Well, I, for one, am glad to hear it is wild there. Anyone in the boarding house now, think, miss?" asked Worth.

"I don't know. Perhaps someone has gone in there from the Canada side. No one went in from here this fall, I am sure of that," answered the girl. "But you inquired about some butter. Mrs. Wilson sold some the other day at the store and I don't think she has any for sale at present. You appear to have all you can carry as it is," indicating with a nod our pile.

"Plenty enough, miss," agreed Worth, "but a little butter would make our dry bread more palatable. If we could get a five pound crock now, we could stick it on the top of our load somewhere, and get it in quite comfortably, I feel sure."

"Well, I will see what there is in the cellar. Mrs. Wilson is not at home. She has gone to East Corinth to see her sick mother, and will not be back until to-night."

The pretty young school-teacher disappeared from view for a few moments and then came back saying that there were two crocks of butter in the cellar, but she was not sure that Mrs.

Wilson wished to sell any, and did not like to take it upon herself to dispose of.

"I am very sorry it is so," she added, "but at least I can give you some lunch, and if you will wait a few minutes I will have it ready."

We expressed our gratitude, and sat down on the kitchen steps to wait. Soon an agreeable odor of frying bacon and eggs drifted out of the window and aroused a keener appetite within us than the crisp fall air already had done. At the conclusion of the culinary mysteries, we were invited inside where we found that our hostess had set a sumptuous repast on the table, including some of the forbidden butter, with fresh made bread. The girl seemed to have perfect confidence in us, which was, perhaps, partly accounted for by the presence of the huge sheep dog, who lay at full length in front of the woodbox keeping his watchful eyes upon us. The girl, no doubt, was influenced also by feminine pity because of the task she saw was laid out for us. When we had finished the meal she refused to receive any payment for it, and added to her kindness by handing us a packet containing bread and bacon. She accompanied us to the front of the house when we prepared to take

our departure. Shouldering our packs with difficulty, we got them settled on our backs; each grasped a gun (Worth also had the axe), and after returning suitable thanks to the kind young woman, we were ready to face the trail. She gave us final instructions for the journey.

"Take down the bars just across the road and cross the pasture lot. You will see the lumber road running straight into the woods. For mercy's sake, keep on the right trail, for there are crossroads running into it in different places and you might turn off into one of them very easily."

Worth studied the sky, noted the sun, which was quartering on our left hand but was still high, also the direction of the wind, which was easterly, and therefore blowing from the right.

"I understand that our general direction to the lakes will be to the northwest," he said.

"Yes," she replied, "generally. I have been over the trail once in the winter with Mr. Butterfield and his wife, of Burlington, who own the mill, and Mr. Butterfield said so at the time. But of course it varies considerably in different places. Have you a compass?"

"No, ma'am," answered Worth, "but I think

we can manage very well. Thank you kindly for your trouble."

"No trouble at all," she assured us. "I am awfully sorry about the butter, but perhaps some one will be going in this winter and if so I will remember to send you some."

We said good-bye to this kind young creature, crossed the road, and took down the bars as directed. Before us lay a smooth pasture lot in which two cows were grazing, and several small pigs were grunting among fallen leaves in the fence corners. We had got halfway to the woods when we heard the school-teacher's clear voice calling to us. Stopping and looking back, we saw her standing by the roadside, her hand held to her mouth trumpetwise, hailing us:

"If you find any persons in the camp tell them that you have permission to stop there, as I have charge of it for Mr. Butterfield."

We shouted back suitable acknowledgments and resumed our journey. On the edge of the woods we stopped again. Worth let down his pack and gazed at the head of the trail which opened directly before us. It was hardly distinguishable because of the fallen leaves and the interlaced branches above. The trees were

quite bare, but they covered the ground thickly, and progress among them, except along the narrow timber road, was impossible owing to the fallen trunks, some of great size, which encumbered the ground everywhere. Bushes and tangled briars crept and twisted in all directions, menacing the eyes of anyone who attempted to penetrate the maze. A red squirrel flicked his way up a hickory near us in a series of jerky rushes, arching his tail angrily, and stopping every second to chatter forth his indignation at our presence.

I had let down my pack in imitation of Worth and leaned my gun against a boulder. I turned and looked back the way we had come, and a quarter mile from us, across the road, the school-teacher still watched us. The westering sun set her form in clear relief. She was the last friend we were to see for a long time. The old farmhouse and the school building looked bright and cheery. Over miles of peaceful country the haze of late autumn still lingered as if loath to give way to stern and forbidding winter, which was rapidly drawing near.

"You recollect that fellow, Dante, I think his name was," quoth my comrade to me, "who

wrote, 'Leave hope behind, ye who enter here.' What do you think about this archway into the unknown before us?"

I turned to look. Worth was surveying the trail with a half-humorous, half-serious expression, and pointing straight toward Averil, or nearly so.

"According to the best advices," he continued, "we have thirty miles or thereabouts of forest to traverse, on foot and loaded to the guards. That means, of course, that with every additional mile, we'll withdraw further from civilization—from home, friends and ministering care. Serious undertaking, my boy."

But a twinkle in his eye as he looked round at me assured me that he was talking only for the sake of hearing himself talk,—a fault of his —so I replied:

"Do you remember, Worth, that other story about the knight who came to the enchanted castle and saw over the door these words, 'Be bold!' and on entering, he came to another door and saw over the entrance, 'Be bold'; and he came to a third door and saw over it the legend 'Be not *too* bold!' Well, we will be wise in that way. We will be bold to enter here, and

be bold when we are trail-sick some time to-morrow or next day, and when we strike a cross trail so's we can't tell what to do next, we will be not too bold. This is the lesson,—we will consider well, be wise and cautious, and thus get through to the Averil Lakes."

"Spoken like a college professor," said Worth, taking up his duffle, and uttering a grunt as it settled in place on his back. "How much weight here, do you imagine?"

"About sixty pounds, I should think."

"It will seem like a hundred and fifty this time to-morrow," he grumbled. He caught sight of the school-teacher watching us. She waved her hand. We flourished our guns, which was the most convenient way for us to reply, and then plunged into the woods and were lost to human sight.

CHAPTER III

THE TIMBER ROAD

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon. We calculated to walk until dusk, as the weather was clear and camp could be made quickly, dry wood for fuel being abundant. The road was well defined, once the eye became accustomed to it as, for the width of a sled and team, the trees had all been cut; but it wound to the right or left to avoid some boulder, or stump, or huge forest tree; then rose over a ridge to avoid some wet and marshy place, or sank into a hollow to make the hauling easier over broken ground. The crisp leaves gave forth a pleasant rustling sound underfoot, their strong autumn fragrance filling the air. No signs of life was visible; but for the faint trace of man's handiwork in the blazed out way we were following, we might well have persuaded ourselves that we were the sole original occupants of this wilderness. We were fresh again and light-hearted; our loads did not bother us as yet,

and pleasant anticipations of our winter's sport and of a wealth of furs filled our thoughts. For a time we plodded along in silence.

When we entered the woods it was in a general northwesterly direction, but after an hour's travel, and judging by the sun over our backs, we were heading east. The road was plain, however. We had encountered no embarrassing cross trails, and our progress was fairly rapid and certain.

"If it is all like this," said Worth, "we shall have an easy time of it. How far have we got, do you think?"

"Better than three miles," I answered, "and in another hour or so we will have to look about for a camping place. Sun goes to bed early this time of the year."

"Any animals around in these woods? From the stillness one would think there weren't any in these parts."

"Too near civilization, and too much hunting. Yet I suppose if we were to take a stand here and remain perfectly quiet, we should see more than you think for; there must be deer all around us."

Steady tramping for another hour, during

which time our packs again began to weigh heavily on our unaccustomed shoulders, brought us to a little rill of clear cold water crossing the path, over which logs had been laid as a bridge, but these were now decayed and lay sprawled in all directions. The route had brought us down into a hollow, and around us thick growths of balsam and spruce shut out both wind and light. It was already twilight here and time for a halt.

"Likely place," said Worth. "What say, my boy?"

"Best place we've seen for a camp; water, wood, and bedding all at hand." I dropped my burden at the foot of a low growing cedar, and took the axe. "We won't need a shanty tonight; not too cold and the weather is clear. All we want is a fire on the lee side of these thick cedars."

Worth seized a pail and went to get some water for tea. I broke up some dry branches for kindling, and cut two small, straight poles, notched them on the ends, and drove them into the earth near the cedars. A crosspiece laid between them made a pot holder. Some dry wood and a bunch of birch-bark underneath

soon gave us a roaring fire. The ruddy glare lighted up the shadows and lent a more cheerful aspect to the darkening woods. The pail of brook water began to steam, and the pleasant fragrance of simmering tea filled the air. The bread and bacon we had obtained from the school-teacher were sliced and made into sandwiches, and a number of mugs of fresh tea refreshed us mightily. Our next care was to make our beds, which was accomplished by gathering a number of hemlock boughs and strewing them around on the ground by the fire, to the depth of a foot or more.

Our horse-blankets of thick wool were then unstrapped from the top of the bags and flung over the pile. We did not unroll them because of the heavy dew which was falling. We squatted by the fire and prepared to enjoy our first night in the forest.

"Five miles from the school-teacher to-night, Worth," I said reflectively. "We were hungry and she fed us; were thirsty and—"

"She gave us bread and bacon," broke in Worth, "and it is all gone. What for breakfast? A little selection from our bags?"

"Can you think of breakfast and of a lovely

girl at the same time?" I asked. "The connection is remote."

"If breakfast is remote when the proper time comes, look out for squalls, that's all," retorted Worth.

"Breakfast will appear in due course," I said loftily; "hast ever partaken of that delectable dish, hasty pudding, honored friend?"

"Oft times, forsooth!" he replied in the same vein.

"That will be the basis of our repast, boiled in a pot over a cedar fire, and glazed with melted sugar. Hast any peevish objection to this?"

"None, so long as there is enough of it," replied Worth, in matter-of-fact tones and the conversation dropped.

We thought in silence for some time, our eyes fixed on the glowing heart of the fire. Night had settled down very dark and gloomy, but overhead through the leafless branches, countless points of light glittered in the sky, to which our eyes often turned in silent wonder. Later on a crescent yellow moon arose and shone through the trees.

I got up from the fire and walked off from

the camp a little ways. I could see Worth sitting contentedly by the bright blaze, though I was lost in the shadow, and noticed with pleasure the various domestic arrangements conducive to our comfort scattered about. Around me all was vague and uninhabited wilderness, but I enjoyed the quiet solitude of the place and time. Without the presence of Worth and the fire so near, however, it would have been a dreary situation indeed. As it was, it felt like home to me, and I felt that I would not exchange places with king or emperor that night. Before returning, I stooped and felt the fallen leaves; they were dry and crisp. No dew was in the night air, or at least very little, and, according to an old belief, this fact indicated the approach of rain, despite the fairness of the night. But the evening was drawing on and we wished for an early start in the morning, so our fire was replenished until it burned with a steady glow. A pile of chopped wood was put where it would keep dry for the night; and rolling ourselves in the blankets, we lay down to sleep. We had cut out a few branches from one side of the cedar against which our bed was laid, and drawn the hemlock mattress well

into the cavity, so that we were lying almost in the heart of the living tree, with the warm fire at our feet. It was a novel bedchamber.

After some pleasant complainings about the number of bedbugs which he found in this hotel, Worth dropped off to sleep. But I could not follow his example for a long time. The strangeness of the situation, the solemn night, and the complete silence reigning around made me wakeful. Time passed in a slow march with me. Ideas took fantastic shapes, and the bushy trees became a cathedral. I fancied I heard sweet music sound in the distance, and then a choir of heavenly voices intoned some old-world melody: A sacrificial fire glowed red and large before me, around which danced grotesque figures, naked, or else decked with barbaric jewels.

Then, suddenly—

"Wake up there, sleepyhead! Are you going to stay here all day? Daytime: and rain coming, or I'm a Dutchman."

I started up in alarm and saw Worth bending over me shaking me vigorously by the shoulder. It was broad day; clouds and a damp wind had come during the night and the leaves

were blowing through the woods. Our campfire was burning merrily and over it the four quart tin pail hung, half filled with boiling water.

"Wash your head in the brook and then come and make that hasty pudding you spoke of last night," quoth my comrade. "I don't know how to make it and I'm hungry as a bear."

I scrambled out from the tree and stretched my stiff frame into something like flexibility, for I had slept the whole night through almost without a turn, and my muscles felt cramped and sore. Going down to the stream I soused my face and head in the clear cold water and took a deep draught of it also, and then returning to the fire, at once set about getting breakfast ready.

"The way to make good hasty pudding," I began, "is the old Yankee way that our forefathers and perhaps the Indians before them used to boil their pounded maize. Listen well! Have your water slightly salted and at a good boil, pour in your meal slowly so as not to stop the boiling and to prevent the meal settling on the bottom of the pail. Pour until the meal begins to 'blubber'; let it stay two or three min-

utes; take off, and your pudding is done." Suiting my actions to the words, I now unhooked the pail from the crosspiece over the fire, and set it on the ground. "Get the plates ready, Worth," I directed. "Where's the sugar?"

The golden yellow meal, soft and steaming hot, was deposited on our plates, a layer of sugar sprinkled thereon, and we sat down on stumps by the fire to dispose of it. Two or three helpings of this, with hot tea, made a sufficient breakfast for us.

"Not much variety to it," remarked Worth, "but it is both satisfying and filling."

"It will stay by you and keep you warm," I answered, "and in the woods is easily prepared when nothing else offers. But come, boy, let's get the dishes washed, it's high time we were hitting the trail. Rain in the wind, too, and I'm afraid we will have a wetting before we camp again."

The pails and platters were dipped in the brook, rinsed off and repacked, the dishes inside the bag, and the pails strapped on top. Shouldering our bundles and grasping our guns and axes, we set forth.

The timber road rose out of the hollow in

which we had camped, crossed a ridge, and continued on through the interminable stretch of woods. To right and left towered numerous monarchs of the wilds, mostly hardwood, as yet untouched by the lumberman, and other giants lay here and there prostrate in the different stages of decay—more than one lying directly across the path where, at one time or another, they had been chopped or sawed through to permit the passage of a team. The trail was exceedingly rough. Corduroy long laid, had settled in soft places leaving a hole into which we stumbled; or the logs projected sufficiently to trip us unexpectedly, causing us to rush forward to keep from falling. Round-backed boulders slippery with moss also kept us sliding and tottering to recover our balance.

"I don't wonder that boy said it would break a wagon all to pieces going through here," growled Worth. "Beastlier road I never saw."

"This trail is used by teams only in the winter," I replied. "When the snow comes good and plenty all these hollows and bumps are covered up and the sleds go over them without trouble. Not so in the Summer, however, or the Fall either, for that matter.

"I wish we had a two foot snow-storm right now," snapped Worth. "There's wood enough round here to make a million sleds, and with one of them we could reach the lakes in a hurry."

"We don't want snow yet awhile. We must have some pleasant weather yet for trapping. Later on the snow can come and welcome. Keep a lookout for squirrels, Worth, we must have some meat for dinner."

Oaks and hickories were all through the woods and where these nut trees are squirrels are sure to be. I had seen their tracks already in the soft ooze along the sides of the road, and kept a sharp lookout on my side high up in the trees. I had some small shot in my gun and was a fair shot at such game.

We had been tramping steadily for three or four hours and in spite of the bad conditions of things underfoot, had covered a considerable distance. Many miles of woods lay all around us now: soon we should be half way to Averil. A short rest every hour or so had refreshed us and enabled us to keep up a good gait. In one of these pauses, while sitting quietly alongside the road, I heard a pattering in the leaves close by. Looking up quickly, I saw a large gray squirrel

making for a tall tree about twenty-five yards from me. He reached it and started to climb the trunk, but before he could get more than a foot from the ground, my shot-gun had been leveled and fired, and the squirrel dropped back limp and motionless at the base of the tree. Going to the place, I picked up the pretty little animal. He was fat and heavy for his size and had his winter coat on of a beautiful gray color, thick and soft. Although the fur of the gray squirrel is not of much value, I resolved to keep our first pelt as an omen of good luck.

"Good shot," exclaimed Worth approvingly, "one or two more like that little fellow and we shall have enough for dinner. What nice fur he has!"

"Prime small pelt, Worth," I replied. "But it is strange we do not see a deer; there ought to be plenty of them in these woods."

"We make too much noise for them; they hear us before we can get anywhere near them." This was probably the case.

We resumed our march. A little while afterwards rounding a bend in the path, we suddenly came upon a doe and fawn standing motionless and gazing curiously down the trail. With

ears erect, and alive to any danger, they presented a pretty sight. They were the first wild deer we had ever seen and we stopped to admire them. As we did so they took alarm; with a whistle of astonishment the doe turned and at one mighty bound cleared the bushes lining the road, closely followed by the fawn. They were gone. We could hear the old deer give several more whistles as she dashed away; there was a crashing of branches, and all was still.

"Things are looking more likely," exclaimed Worth delightedly. "It would have been a pity to shoot such graceful creatures."

"I would not think of shooting a doe unless we needed meat, and if she had a fawn I don't know that I would do so even then," I answered. "Come on, boy, one more hike before dinner and then a good rest."

Worth suddenly held his hand out, palm upward, and looked into the tree tops. "I thought I felt rain on my face. Yes, I feel it on my hand. Wet night coming, I think."

"I'm afraid so," I replied. "I was in hope that we could reach the lakes without delay but I think we shall have to lie up somewhere out of the storm."

"Never say die," exclaimed Worth cheerily. "What's a wild woods like this to two seasoned old trappers like ourselves!"

"Far from seasoned yet, but before we get through I'm pretty sure we shall be. Snow and ice and bitter cold on the way, old fellow."

"Forget it," said my comrade. "I'll race you to the next water hole for a dollar."

"I wouldn't get out of this walk for a hundred dollars," I answered with emphasis. "My feet weigh a hundred pounds apiece and this pack about a ton."

"I'm with you there, only I believe you understate the figures somewhat."

About noon, as we judged, although we could not see the sun, we halted, built a fire and made tea which is the lumberman's best friend in the woods, being both refreshing and stimulating. We also cooked some cornmeal mush, having nothing better quickly available, and reserved our squirrel for the night camp when we would have more time to cook it. We succeeded in shooting another fat squirrel on our march soon afterwards, and this fellow gave us more trouble. We scared him from alongside the road into a big tree, and on my dropping my pack and try-

ing to get a shot, the cunning little animal kept circling around the upper part of the trunk so as to always keep it between us. We had to play a trick on him finally. Worth stood a little distance off to one side with his rifle leveled, and the squirrel on rounding the trunk as usual to escape me, espied him at once and made haste to get back on the other side where I stood when I sent him tumbling to the ground in short order.

CHAPTER IV

A CROSS TRAIL

So far we had experienced no trouble in keeping to the main road. No puzzling track had been encountered, except a small side path occasionally, which had been used for hauling in logs, but now barely discernible, having been so long unused, and obviously not the main road.

We came at last to a place where two large and distinct trails stretched out before us forming a fork, with one branch running to the right, and the other to the left. They differed in nowise one from the other. At the point covered with trees and bushes which formed the junction of these roads, we paused and let down our packs, taking off our caps at the same time to cool our heated foreheads.

"Well, we've struck it," groaned Worth, "a cross trail, and no mistake. Which runs into t'other? One of these must be the road we want, and the other strikes into it."

"This is not strictly a cross trail," I said, "for

that would mean a path which comes into the main road and continues on in a straight line beyond it. It is not so here—simply a case of one road running into another. Which is the main road, and which the side road? that's the question."

"It is a cross trail because it makes us cross," replied Worth flippantly. "Perhaps this is the place our little school-teacher had in mind when she said to go northwest."

We looked up to get a bearing by the sun, if possible, but it was not visible, a dull gray mass of clouds covering the sky. We had followed no particular direction in getting to this point; the path wound first one way and then another, and we were unable to say how we had been heading when we reached the fork of the roads.

After a period of cogitation, during which we silently inspected the two routes before us, Worth asked, "How shall we decide; toss up a coin or something to see which way we go?"

"It might as well be that way as any other," I answered, "unless we stay here until we can get a glimpse of the sun."

"And that might keep us here for two or three days," exclaimed Worth wrathfully; "that won't

do. We must take a choice and trust to luck."

During our survey of the locality, I had noticed one fork of the road slightly inclined uphill, as if, at no great distance, it ran over a ridge. An idea entering my head, I told Worth to wait a few moments until I had gone a little way up this road. At thirty or forty rods distance, I found that it did run over such a ridge and rose abruptly at quite a steep angle. I went back almost decided what to do.

"How do you think they cut this log road, Worth?" I began; "from the lakes to the highway, or from the highway to the lakes?"

"From the highway straight in, of course," answered Worth promptly. "It is an old settled country outside the woods, and when they started to cut the pines hereabouts, they must have worked into the woods more and more, until they got to the lakes."

"Just so," I said, "and if you were cutting a road through here would you put it up over a hill or work around it, providing there was no swamp?"

"Go around it, certainly," replied he.

"Then we will take this level road to Averil, the other one runs uphill."

"The water level route," sung Worth, seizing his pack and swinging it on his back. "A great engineer was lost to the world when you went to work as a trapper, my hero."

We resumed the journey with renewed vigor, and pressed on rapidly to make up for lost time. The road we had selected gave every indication of being the right one, keeping on an easy grade and maintaining a fairly well-traveled appearance; and we afterwards learned that the other road ran through the woods for many miles, and finally came out near West Stewartstown, N. H., about ten miles from Averil.

Towards dusk we had put a number of additional miles behind us and then it began to rain. With the rain came a wind that drove the water through the trees against us, and sighed a doleful strain among the branches. We had to make camp without delay, and coming to a likely place, we halted and set to work at once.

"Know how to build a shanty?" asked Worth anxiously. "We must have shelter to-night; heavy rain coming without a doubt."

"I've seen it done, and I think I can manage it," I replied. "Give me the axe, and get some small dry wood if you can, and some water."

I went off through the woods and soon found two or three hemlocks of mighty girth. Cutting a stake and sharpening one end to a broad edge like an axe blade to use as a lever, I quickly girdled the hemlocks with the axe, first close to the ground and then as high as I could reach all around the trees; then cutting a slit downwards between the two girdlings and using the sharpened stake as a pryer, I soon started the bark. It came off in large, beautiful blanket sheets, which I lugged back to the camping place and dropped on the ground close by a fallen tree. I then cut some poles about six feet long, notched, and drove them into the ground; laid crosspieces between them, sloping to the fallen tree, and covered the whole with big pieces of bark. This made a shed, open in the front where the fire was, and proof against the rain on roof and sides.

It looked very cosy and comfortable, and felt so, too, as I stood inside and heard the rain pattering sharply on the roof. A cold easterly wind promised a most disagreeable night. Meanwhile, Worth had trouble with the wood; much of it was wet, and he expressed doubts about being able to get a fire, but this also could be rem-

edied speedily, in woods fashion. Taking time to cut boughs from the hemlocks for bedding, and strewing them under the shack, I searched again through the woods for an old pine stump, found one, and chipped some pieces from it. They were solid and heavy with pitch, and would burn, once alight, even in the rain.

"Dig a little hole just inside the edge of the house, Worth," I called out as I came back with the kindlings, "and build the fire over it. We will have some hot bread baked in that hole for supper, before we're an hour older."

Worth did as directed, and arranged the framework for the tea kettle, then applied the match to a bunch of birch-bark tissue, and our fire was soon blazing.

"Fried pork and squirrel, and hot bread is our bill of fare for to-night," I said, "that is, if the chef knows his business, and he thinks he does."

"Keep it up," encouraged Worth. "You're a wonder. After we come out from here you can get a job in the Hotel Ethan Allen in Burlington and your fame may become world-wide, not only as cook, but as an engineer."

"Thank you kindly," I answered, "there is no

telling what the future holds in store for us."

"Indigestion, maybe, for one thing," suggested Worth.

"Very likely; but two hard tramping fellows like ourselves ought to be able to eat anything. I am hungry enough to eat sawdust."

"Same here. I am like a little bird with its beak open, waiting for something to drop into it." And Worth opened his mouth to its fullest extent to show me just how he felt.

Our fire was sending showers of sparks against the bark roof and out into the open, where they went whirling off through the trees. Soon the interior of the little shack was dry and warm; spreading our blankets over the boughs to take the dampness out of them, we set about getting supper. The squirrels were skinned and cleaned, and the pelts hung temporarily on one side. Cutting up the carcasses I hung them over the fire in some salted water to boil, and got some flour from one of the bags. I also sliced some pork and placed it in the frying pan for use later on. Mixing some flour, water, baking-powder and salt in a tin pail, I put the cover on and making a cavity in the centre of the fire, set the pail down in the hot ground, covering it to

a depth of several inches. The fire was raked back over it and built up again.

"Now bake!" exclaimed Worth, who had watched the operation with interest; "raise yourself and hump yourself: the more you swell up and bluster around the better we shall like you."

"Let us hope for the best," I said, "there's no telling what we shall see when we open that pail. Tea's boiling, Worth, and t'other pot smells very sweetly of squirrel. Let it boil a while longer and then pop the meat into the fry-pan with the pork."

After a time all was ready except the bread. We carefully removed the layer of ashes, and lifted the hot pail from the hole, prying off the cover with a stick. A gust of steam rose from the interior, redolent of appetizing hot dough and we saw, rising to within an inch of the top, a brown loaf that gave every indication of being the real thing.

"A most promising loaf," remarked Worth, eying it with approval. "Allow me to decorate you with the Order of the Fire-pot, also to give you an order on the treasurer for anything you choose to take," and so saying, he deftly turned out the bread onto a piece of hemlock bark, and

made a pretense of handing me the imaginary honors with a courtly bow.

We ate our meal with thorough enjoyment, although the squirrel was not tender and the bread was not what it should have been in the way of lightness and digestibility, but all of it was hot and filling to our craving stomachs, and that is what we chiefly needed after our long day's toil.

Night had settled down in dense gloom around us. A steady rattle on the bark roof told of a downpour going on outside, and we could see the glittering drops as they flashed past down to the ground in front of the hut, lit up by our fire. The wind was penetrating and cold, having a chill in its dampness, but very little came inside the camp as we had faced the entrance round to avoid it. After stepping outside for a few minutes to wash our dishes in the rain, we were glad to return to the cosy interior of the shack.

"It doesn't take much to make a man comfortable after all," remarked my comrade philosophically; "give him a little warmth and some food, put a piece of bark over his head and a fire at his feet, and what cares he for black night, solitude, and the warring elements that nature

spreads about him." He thought a few minutes, his eyes fixed on the glowing coals, and then repeated in a half-soliloquizing manner:

> "Fire warm and bright,
> Camp so snug and tight;
> Make in vain the wind and rain,
> That roar and rage to-night."

"Capital!" I exclaimed, clapping my hands with delight. "You have hit the very spirit of the scene. I have heard more polished verses to be sure, but none that contained more truth to nature."

"Thanks, critic," replied Worth modestly, "nothing of any merit in my humble effort. We have made a start in the trapping business now," he added, indicating the small pelts hanging up to dry. "What best to do with them?"

"They are nice skins," said I, rising and handling the thick, soft little furs, "but they won't bring much unless we have a large number of them. They are used chiefly for linings for coats and gloves and are not much in demand. We will take them along, however, and cure them at the boarding house."

"Strange we have not seen any tracks along the trail. You'd think some animal or other

would be prowling around so far in the woods," Worth remarked.

"Well we haven't kept a very good lookout for them, as we were stamping and sliding along most of the time, but I'm willing to bet that within a mile or two of us right now there is more than one creature which would cause our eyes to bulge out if we could see him. Mink, fox, raccoon, and maybe a lynx, to say nothing of deer. When we get deeper in the woods and off the trail a long way, then you'll see tracks made by real fur animals which are scarcely ever seen around here."

"Such as—" suggested Worth.

"Marten,—maybe a fisher now and then—also otter and beaver, if we can find a good stream which hasn't been trapped for a long time."

"Beavers are mighty scarce in this country," observed Worth, "they were cleaned out in 'Injun' times. Do you really think we'll find any of them?"

"No telling," I answered. "Suppose you left this trail right here in the dead of winter and traveled on snowshoes say twenty miles up Canada way, you might run across a stream in some

big marsh that hadn't been visited in a score of years and find it full of beaver."

"Yes, they travel," admitted Worth. "They might have been in some pond where they were being watched and trapped, and left there in a hurry to seek new quarters."

"Exactly. Now, up in Canada are enormous stretches of woods that harbor plenty of fur animals, and all through that country are trappers driving them out. What more natural than that some of them should come into the mountains to the south, as well as go north or east or west?"

"Yes; and there are others which were born here and think these woods belong to them," chimed in Worth. "This is a good mink country; good brooks full of trout, and where the trout are there you'll find mink."

"And muskrats a-plenty," I added. "Their fur is always in demand; price low, but skins abundant. Hark! Did you hear anything, Worth?"

My comrade fixed his eyes on me at the same instant, his mouth half open as he slowly nodded his head. Above the sound of the rain on the roof and the swaying branches, I had heard a

long-drawn, yowling kind of a cry as if some animal were in pain or terror; a wild and savage yell such as I had never heard before. Worth and I gazed at each other without speaking for some moments, expecting a repetition of the terrifying sound, but it was not repeated and after a while Worth said nervously:

"What on earth was that? Sounded like a panther or an enormous cat."

"And that is just what it was," I replied, starting up. "There is only one animal in these woods that will make a noise like that—a lynx—and he isn't far off, either."

We stepped to the entrance of the shack and peered forth into the night, straining our ears to catch the slightest sound, but heard nothing save the falling rain and the sighing wind. After listening a long time, we returned to our places by the fire and strove to resume our interrupted talk.

"We're getting onto the grounds, that's certain," remarked Worth. "Such a yell as that isn't heard around a barnyard any more these days. What ails the critter, d'you think?"

"Hunting something—hungry—pure deviltry—showing his nature as a wildcat—take your

choice," I answered. "We are at least fifteen or twenty miles in the woods and from now on we shall hear and see strange things, depend on it."

"If that fellow is as ugly as he sounds he must be a tough customer."

"Well, the lynx is a hard nut to crack if you get too close to him, but as a rule trappers don't fear him. If he gets into a trap give him a shot in the head, that's the best way to deal with him. His fur is valuable nowadays; the animals are not as plentiful as they were once."

Worth got up to put more wood on the fire and looked again outside. "A beast of a night," he muttered. "I hope that lynx doesn't come prowling around the camp on his trapesin' through the woods."

"A good fire will scare him away; he won't bother us, I guess. Time to turn in, isn't it? One more day's travel ought to bring us to the lakes. We must try and make an early start."

"If we can!" growled Worth. "We won't be able to travel if this rain continues as it gives every indication of doing."

Then, seeing that the fire was well supplied

with wood, several sturdy pieces of log being laid over all to smoulder through the night, we both lay down on the boughs, rolled ourselves snugly in the blankets and were soon asleep.

Morning dawned cold and rainy. The woods looked dreary enough, moisture falling from the branches overhead in a steady drizzle, and the wind sweeping rain across the trail in a disheartening way. Our customary breakfast of hot cornmeal mush and tea, with some of the bread left over, did nothing to cheer up the situation, and we spent several hours under our shelter, fretting at the delay.

"No arriving at the lakes to-day," observed Worth gloomily; "another night in the woods for us. This log road seems as if it was a hundred miles long."

"We have done well enough, considering everything," I answered. "We might, for instance, be off the trail wandering round these woods and not knowing which way to turn."

"We may be off the trail right now for all we know," objected Worth. "Maybe the other road was the one we should have taken."

"Perhaps, but I do not think so. If the rain lets up a little we must push ahead and make

camp again. It won't take us long to knock up another shack."

"I'm ready to start now; what say?"

"Not just yet, I think. Wait a while longer. I believe the clouds are thinning somewhat and the rain may stop for good."

Towards noon the rain ceased, but the weather was still threatening. However, we hastily shouldered our belongings and left camp at a dog-trot, wetting ourselves to the thighs crashing through the bushes which here and there had sprung up in the path. We traveled steadily until almost evening, our long stay in the hut having refreshed us wonderfully, and before night had again encamped. The rain held off all the afternoon, but set in again at evening and kept up a steady downpour until morning, when it ceased. No sun greeted us at breakfast time, the same gray and sombre sky hanging over us, with rain ready to fall at any time; but we at once prepared to start.

"If I calculated rightly, Worth, we have less than ten miles to go, perhaps only five," I said after breakfast was over. "A half day's travel ought to bring us to the lakes."

"Heaven bless you for those words," replied

Worth fervently. "I am petered out and sick of this eternal splashing along through puddles and over rocks and stumps. You couldn't make it only one mile to go, could you?"

"I'm afraid not," I replied. "I shan't make it more than I can help, you can bet. Forward, march!"

We resumed our journey. Less than a mile further on we came to where another well-defined trail ran into ours, continued diagonally across it and disappeared in the woods on the other side.

"Here's your cross trail,—and a good specimen of one," I remarked. "Our little school-teacher needn't have been afraid we should take this, however, as it is easy to distinguish from the one we are on."

"Bless her heart, she meant well," exclaimed Worth; "but if there weren't an engineer along this trip, I might have needed her advice."

"Let up about the engineer," I said somewhat nettled. "Perhaps a little common sense may appear to you as unusual engineering talent, but—"

"Enough," said Worth, with a grin. "I cry quits. But say, man, what do you make of

this?" indicating as he spoke two deep round holes two or three inches across, which showed large in the mud at our feet. "Some animal passed across this trail in the night." Stooping, we gazed attentively at the signs. It was evident no house cat had made those tracks; they were the footprints of a much larger animal of the same species. Toe and claw-marks showed but faintly but the padded part of the foot made a bowl-shaped depression in the soft earth. There were but two tracks to be seen distinctly in the path, but further up on the slight incline bordering it, were long furrows in the fallen leaves and twigs, showing where the animal had scrambled up and re-entered the woods.

"The lynx we heard in the night or I'm a sinner," I exclaimed. "What a bound he gave when he jumped out on the trail; he landed like a pile-driver in this mud and water."

"He has traveled quite a way from where we heard him, if it is the same one. We may get this fellow yet in our traps," said Worth.

We resumed our way with painful limps and uneasy shifting of baggage. The journey was beginning to tell on us, and the cold and inclement weather added to our distress. We had

no means of telling how far we had come, but in spite of all difficulties our gait had been a good one and had enabled us to cover very many miles. It did not seem possible that much more remained to go over—not more than a few miles at the most—and at each turn in the log-road, I kept glancing ahead expecting to see some sign of the camp, or at least the gleam of water, but was continually disappointed. After plowing along for a considerable time during which both of us were glum and silent, rain began to fall, gently at first and then at a steady pour. I looked at Worth inquiringly.

"Keep at it," he said doggedly. "Rain be hanged. No stop now until we reach the lakes."

"It may be several miles," I ventured.

"I don't care if it's several hundred; that's the way I feel," growled my comrade. "Do or die now, what say?"

Our clothing became heavy with water, and the rain splashed on our faces unheeded. The packs on our backs kept some water off of us but not much. Splash! Slip! Slide! Packs were shifted uneasily from one shoulder to the other, guns passed from left hand to right and

back again; caps pulled down more firmly over wet foreheads, and our tired feet lifted themselves monotonously and plumped down in fresh places. It seemed an interminable journey.

"Any sign of the boarding house, yet?" asked Worth wearily, too tired to lift his eyes as we came on top of a ridge where we could see quite a way ahead along the trail.

"Nothing," I answered, "not a sign of it, but we'll make it yet. Keep going if you can, or would you rather camp here?"

"No, sir-ee," replied Worth firmly, "no camp for me. That lake must be near us or else we are miles out of our way."

"We'll strike it within a mile, I'll bet on it," I said confidently.

"I hope so," said Worth dejectedly. He dropped his gun in the path and recovered it with difficulty. I had already taken the axe from his hand, and seeing that he was nearly done, I insisted on taking his gun, against which he feebly protested.

"Let me alone; carry your own stuff," he muttered feebly.

We went on a short distance further. Worth

became weaker and weaker. I seriously considered making camp right there, deeming it folly to proceed under such circumstances, and was about to stop Worth by force if necessary, when the latter, who had stumbled a little in advance and round a bend in the road, suddenly shouted in a strong voice,—"A palace! The lakes! The lakes!"

CHAPTER V

THE BOARDING HOUSE

We arrived at Little Averil on the 12th of November and our first view of the camp and lake was taken under most unfavorable circumstances. Soaked to the skin, and so dog-tired that the mere lifting of our feet was a torture, the packs weighing us to the earth; our endurance was at the breaking point. A sodden day was waning fast and another stormy night coming on. Food, warmth and shelter were imperative. Would we find them here at our journey's end through a long and severe winter? This thought bothered me as I stood with Worth at the top of a steep descent in the trail, and gazed at the scene before me.

About forty rods from us, visible through the trees, was a large camp,—"the boarding house" —we had heard the school-teacher speak of, and truly from its size and because of our miserable condition, it seemed a palace as Worth had

termed it. What its condition was as a means of shelter we could not determine. It looked deserted enough, and forlorn, buried in the woods with the road running along one side of it. In front, about the same distance away, lay Little Averil lake, quiet and motionless, whipped by the rain. It was almost circular in shape, three-quarters of a mile in length, with mountains forming a bowl around it. Off to one side and close to the lake was a ruinous building, once a sawmill. Its roof sagged badly, and boards were missing from its sides. Sawdust, many feet thick, lay all around, mixed with broken planks, logs, and slabs of all sizes and shapes. We would have no lack of wood; there was enough there to last us for five years. Evidently someone had endeavored to burn the sawdust at one time, for in the piles, at different places, we saw black hollows where fire had struggled vainly to penetrate the heavy packed mass. I had heard that these sawdust piles would smoulder for years if once got to burning, the fire eating its way by inches into them.

"Fine lake," remarked Worth, his teeth chattering with the cold, and his body bent half to the ground under his load. "Let's get on, for

Heaven's sake, where we can have a fire and something to eat; I'm almost gone."

"Come on at once," I shouted, "we're fools to be standing here anyway. Push on to the hotel ahead there and never mind the view."

We started down the incline on a run towards the camp. On reaching the house we saw that it had been built with some care as it was stoned up underneath. One broken window was to be seen on the side and in front was another window, and a door with a mosquito frame still hanging from it. A little porch ran the width of the house.

"Those sawmill fellows had an eye for comfort," I observed. "Wonder if we shall find any rocking chairs inside?"

"Shouldn't wonder," replied Worth, dropping his burden with a bang on the step, and sitting down on the wet boards with a long sigh. "Door fastened?"

"There's a rusty padlock and a staple on it," I replied, giving it a shake, but it held firmly. "Have to pry out this staple, I guess." Finding a suitable piece of wood, I introduced it underneath the hasp and after two or three attempts managed to get the staple out and the

door open. Before us was a tiny hallway, with a rough stairway leading to the loft. On one side was a good-sized room, containing a table and a stove. A long bench ran in front of the window, and scattered about the floor were various cooking utensils, most of them broken. A little cupboard held some bottles and small packages whose contents we decided to investigate later. Adjoining this room was a bunk room containing one large and two small berths, all lined with mouldy hay. A strong scent of pine was present in the house but was not disagreeable, in fact, rather pleasant to smell.

The first thing to attend to was getting a fire; dryness and warmth were immediately necessary. On investigation, we found a woodbox behind the stove half-filled with kindlings and several big chunks of wood lying beside it. Filling the stove, we soon got the wood blazing and shortly had a roaring fire. The flames lit up the room in a most cheerful manner as we divested ourselves of our wet garments, and hung them steaming on nails driven in the boards. By the firelight we unpacked the bags, got out a change of clothing, very damp but in much better condition than that we had dis-

carded, and drew the bench close to the radiant heat where we sat in luxurious enjoyment of our situation.

"I wouldn't ask any better quarters than these for the winter," observed Worth who was recovering rapidly from his fatigue. "This Franklin stove is a wonder; look at the tremendous oven it has attached to it."

"Fine!" I exclaimed. "Wait until you see the batches of biscuit and bread that will come out of that oven. I believe I'll bake a pan of hot biscuit for supper."

"Noble idea," said Worth. "In what condition is the flour; did you notice?"

"Dry as a stick, except the sacking; that's pretty damp."

"I never want a tramp like that again," said Worth earnestly. "When we go out of this country we must have a conveyance to carry our duffle properly."

"When we go out we'll do it with the easiest rig in the world—a sled. But we'll have to haul the load instead of packing it on our backs."

"Child's play compared with having your backbone hit your breastbone every step you

take," affirmed Worth with emphasis. "It will be lots easier. After supper we'll take a look at the loft overhead. This place has not been occupied for a long time and we want to see just how everything is around us." A scurrying sound was heard on the upper floor. My partner looked at me inquiringly.

"Mice!" I said. "We must look to the provisions or they will be nibbled up very quickly. We're dry and warm, so now for supper. I'll make some biscuits at once." A pan was set outside under the eaves to catch some rain water. I mixed up a mess of dough and put the pan in the heated oven; then fried some pork and put the kettle on for tea.

In due time the biscuits were taken out, done to a turn, and our first meal in the boarding house was an enjoyable one. After it was over we prepared to go upstairs to inspect the loft before turning in. A few candles were in our bundles, and obtaining one of them we went to the little hallway, Worth preceding me with the light which he held above his head. A black void yawned above. Night had settled down long since, and we heard the rain and wind roaring outside. On our pausing at the foot of the

stairs to listen, we heard nothing inside the house except the faint crackling of the wood in the stove.

"What was this loft used for, do you suppose?" asked Worth. "The men slept down here and I can't see the use of a loft at all."

"Oh, perhaps more bunks are up here," I answered, "although people sleeping up here in the winter must have been very cold; too far from the fire."

"You can bet it is," answered Worth, as he started up, "and I wouldn't sleep in this mice-infested loft anyway for a fortune." The candle cast trembling shadows on the walls and the stairs creaked under foot. We had got halfway up when a heavy, rushing noise was heard above and a thumping sound against the sides or roof. We stopped in trepidation. "Something alive up there," whispered Worth, casting uneasy glances above. "What say to waiting for daylight to explore this place?"

"How are we going to sleep with that noise going on?" I whispered back. "We must find out what is up there."

"Get the gun then, and be quick about it." I ran into the lower room and returned with the

rifle and the axe, which latter implement I handed to Worth. With more confidence we recommenced our ascent, and reached the top step when suddenly our ears were assailed with a stentorian cry.

"Hoo—hoo-a-hoo—ahoo-aho-oo-oo-o!" At the same time two large owls whose eyes were turned on us, gleaming with yellow fire in the candlelight, bumped against the roof and then with slowly beating wings flew out of a hole in the side of the house, close under the eaves.

"Go it, ye cripples!" yelled Worth, waving his light around his head and examining the interior of the loft with a rapid eye. "Board loose here, we had better nail it up in the morning."

Nothing else was found there except some cast-off articles on the floor, and one or two extra bunks. The house was tenantless save for ourselves and the mice; so with a feeling of relief we descended to the lower floor. Too tired to do more that night, we spread our blankets out on the floor by the fire and slept soundly until morning.

Day dawned with the storm gone, a cool northwest wind blowing the rain-clouds back, and allowing the blue sky to peep out here and

there between. After breakfast we sallied out to inspect our surroundings more fully. We bent our steps towards the ruinous old sawmill. Here we saw the machinery still in place,—the large circular saw with its sharp teeth in good condition except for a liberal coating of rust; belts and pulleys sagging about, mouldy, and unshipped from their fastenings. A log runway descended to the water's edge at a point where, in time past, thousands of pine logs had bumped and chafed against each other, waiting their time to mount the incline and go under the curved teeth. On the saw-frame above we saw these words written with a pencil in a good hand:

"Closed Down, June 4th. Company busted. Good bye."

"What do you suppose they left all this machinery here for?" inquired Worth. "It must be quite valuable."

"It would cost more to haul the old stuff away than to set up a new outfit; that's my opinion," I said.

"Seems a pity to lose it, but I guess they got

a good many thousand dollars from these mountains."

"Yes, and there is plenty of timber here yet," I answered. "To look around it wouldn't seem as if they'd taken anything out of these woods."

We reached the lake shore and gazed around in admiration. The waters were ruffled by the brisk wind, and sparkled with crystal purity. Close to us rose a mountain with rocky and precipitous sides covered with trees and bushes to a height of some eight hundred feet. This we afterwards learned bore the name of Nulhegan mountain, and from the lake side it seemed inaccessible without some pretty dangerous climbing. Smaller hills stretched around the basin of the lake, clothed in forest to their tops. Near where we stood was a swampy place, covered with shallow water, with many dead trees in it standing at all angles; and fallen branches lay here and there among them, making a perfect network of obstructions.

We looked about for some means of going out on the lake to explore the further shores. Walking around it in the woods was a slow and tiresome proceeding. After some search we were overjoyed to find an old batteau lying on

the shore, half concealed under some refuse wood. Half its length was in the water but it looked still serviceable. Clearing away the broken pieces of plank, we found that, with a little repairing and calking, the old craft would undoubtedly carry us on the lake safely, and we set about the work at once. Plenty of old nails were lying about the mill floor, and in a short time we had the boat floating. It did not remain on top long, however, but gradually sank in the shallow water until only its gunwales were visible.

"She has got to soak up," observed Worth; "she'll be all right in a little while. While waiting we can clean out the camp, get in some fresh bedding, and lug in wood—plenty for us to do."

We took two hours at this work and got the camp in a cosy condition. A lot of planking and short lengths of logs were prepared for the stove, and stacked up inside and under the house. Fresh long marsh grass, dry and fragrant, was cut and laid in the wide bunk which we had selected for our sleeping place, and it made an ideal bed. Our traps and other duffle were laid in convenient places. After all was

done, we sallied out to inspect the batteau. She still rested on the bottom of the lake, and it required considerable effort to get her partly ashore and free of water.

When launched again she floated lightly, leaking only a little, and this could be kept down by an occasional bailing. We made two paddles from suitable wood, and taking one of the guns, and a fish line, set out to explore the lake.

CHAPTER VI

AVERIL LAKES

Our boat was an unwieldy affair and required hard paddling to keep her head pointed in the right direction. The wind was strong and drove several waves over the side against us in a disagreeable manner, but this small wetting did not annoy us so much as the water which came in around the bottom boards, and soon rose to our ankles. We had an old pail in the boat and with quick work soon got the water down and kept it so. We headed the batteau round the north side of the lake to get out of the wind as much as possible and coasted along a high wooded bank that opened here and there into small coves; some of these contained bunches of lily pads, brown with the frosts. We kept a lookout for deer, but saw none. A dead silence prevailed over lake and forest.

"Not a soul within miles of this place," remarked Worth. "We might be within the

Arctic circle and not be much lonelier than we are likely to be here this winter."

"There may be other trappers in these woods," said I, "and we shall probably see signs of them when the snow comes. What say to our steering out a little and trolling for a fish; there must be something here worth catching."

"Pretty late for trolling," observed Worth. "What have you got for a rig?"

"Pork strip, and a good bass hook. Get into deep water, Worth, and try and keep her going. I'll help as soon as I get the line out."

I quickly had the pork strung on the hook and it looked like a long white minnow; put on a light sinker, and when the batteau was in deep black water, dropped the troll overboard. I paddled hard to help keep the old boat going, holding my line with my teeth. For a while nothing happened but when we were nearing the upper end of the lake, I got a good strike which pulled my jaw out a little, and I felt a heavy fish on the line. I dropped the paddle and yanked him in fast. He was a three-pound lake trout. We were glad to get him as our food supply from this time on must be largely obtained from lake and woods. We stowed the

fish under the stern seat and resumed our paddling. No more strikes rewarded our efforts and soon afterwards we landed on the rocky side of a small dam which had been built at the north end. Over this the water was falling into a deep pool some twenty feet below, from which a lively stream raced along for a short distance until it was lost to view in the woods.

"This, I take it, is the outlet of Little Averil," I said, "and not far from here we shall strike Big Averil. The two lakes are connected by this stream, I believe."

"Likely place for mink," commented Worth, eyeing the stream below; "also muskrat. There are marshy places along here where we'll see plenty of signs, I'll bet."

"Let's leave the batteau here while we explore the brook," I replied. "We shall have to follow along in the bed as much as possible for the bushes are too thick on shore."

We climbed down to the water and picked our way cautiously along, stepping from rock to rock, and at times walking along the bank in places where there was an open space. Rotting logs lay along the sides and projected into the stream; and on these we saw signs that con-

vinced us it would be well to set a few traps in this locality. Small, deep holes opened before us at different points, and Worth declared this was a good trout stream, and where there were trout, mink were sure to be.

At the end of an hour's walk, we came to a broad, marshy place where, in a shallow bed, the brook entered Big Averil Lake, which lay before us. We stood on its shore and gazed about with mute pleasure. The wide, open prospect and the tumbling waters bounded by solitary wooded mountains, were most enjoyable after our journey along the closely hemmed-in stream. But the wind was keen on the open shore, and after a brief survey, we struck into the woods again, determined to explore the country as far as one end of the lake, which we judged was about two miles from us. We found a narrow trail leading through the woods in the right direction, so we followed it. At the end of a mile or more we reached another brook coming out of a valley into the lake, and we went up this a short distance. Our chances for mink here, we thought, were good.

Quoth Worth, "To-morrow or to-day if we can, we must try to get some fish to bait our

traps. Muskrats will do, but we'll need fish, too; some large dace and minnows are in these brooks. We may be able to catch a few trout also, and if we can, they will do first rate for bait."

"All the trout we shall catch will do better work for us in the fry-pan," I answered. "I have a scheme for trap bait which I think will work. Wait until we get back to camp."

"We will set some mink traps along the outlet brook," continued Worth, "and run a line of them from there through the woods to this stream. And that deadwater place on Little Averil where all the old trees are must be a good place for mink and muskrat."

"Did you notice on the outer brook near one of the big pools a bare place that looked like a path up the bank?" I asked. "Well, I am as sure as I can be without seeing him that there is an otter on that brook and the path is one of his runways."

"Good!" ejaculated Worth. "A trap will soon find that out for us."

Descending the brook again to the lake, we continued on along the trail to the upper end of Big Averil. No more brooks were crossed,

and we decided to confine ourselves for the present to trapping over the ground we had visited. On our return along the shore to the outlet of Little Averil, we found a small trail from the big lake to the smaller one, which obviated our returning up the bed of the stream, and this saved us much trouble. Everything was as we had left it at the dam, and pushing off the batteau, we set out for the camp. Rounding a little point which concealed from view one of the lily-pad coves, we came suddenly upon a deer standing a little way back from the shore, and half concealed in the bushes. It was a buck. We stopped paddling and Worth reached cautiously for his rifle, but the deer had his ears raised and pointed in our direction, and his large eyes were fixed upon us as we came round the point. With a snort of alarm he turned, flourished his white tail almost in our faces, and was out of sight in an instant.

"Another chance gone," groaned Worth. "We ought to keep a better lookout for these fellows."

"He saw us before we saw him," I exclaimed; "no chance to get him at all. But I tell you what we'll do; to-night just before dusk, we'll

steal down here in the boat and try to 'jack' him, or one like him."

"Where's the jack?" demanded Worth.

"We must make one out of a candle,—we can shine his eyes with that. If a deer once sees the light and doesn't hear anything to frighten him, we are pretty sure of getting him, for he will stand."

This method of shooting is prohibited in many states, in this day of vanishing woodland game; but we determined to try it, as we had to get some meat that night.

On arriving at the boarding house, we had a hasty lunch and set about getting traps in order, sorting out the smaller ones suitable for mink and muskrat, and providing for them a few stakes about two feet long and just large enough round for the ring on the chains to slip through. These were for the traps that required to be staked out; some of the others we intended to use in another way. I walked around the shore for the purpose of inspecting the deadwater, and on coming back told Worth that there was a small brook at the head of it extending back into a marshy spot where I believed were both

muskrats and minnows as bait for our mink traps.

"How are you going to get minnows," inquired Worth. "We have not a net and no hooks small enough for them."

"We have a few trout hooks but I don't think we need angle for them. I shall contrive a net out of our canvas bags. The scheme is this: We will go to the head of the deadwater with a couple of poles and beat up the brook to a narrow part. Most of the small fish will swim ahead of the disturbance, and by stretching the bags behind them, one of us can drive them back over the canvas. In this manner we can yank a bushel of them out of the water if they will only swim over it."

"Sounds all right; we can try it, anyway," answered Worth. I got the bags, ripped the seams lengthwise, and with needle and thread joined them in the middle. This made a sheet about six feet wide and four feet long. To this we attached pieces of old rope to haul it by, and were then ready to start. Skirting the shore we went round the deadwater, picking up two long poles on the way and reached the mouth

of the brook. It was only a few feet wide, narrowing to a mere spring at its head. and about two feet deep. We were by no means sure there were any fish in it but we commenced beating its surface and jabbing the poles close in under the banks. As we progressed we saw a number of dace darting along ahead, also two or three swift-dashing forms which I thought were trout. We kept up the splashing and poking until we came to a narrow spot, where the water, while deeper than we liked, was clear and afforded a chance to spread our bags over the bottom. The straps were attached on one side to a dead tree and on the other side were held by Worth. After instructing my comrade as to how he should act I stole off a little ways and then along the brook so as to get above the fish and suddenly dashing into the water began belaboring its surface with the pole and making a loud splashing with my feet. The frightened fish dashed downwards in a body and as they swam over the canvas, Worth jerked it into the air holding its two edges upwards so that the fish could not get over the sides. Careful as he was, however, a number of them fell back in the brook while others which had escaped the trap

fled like lightning downstream. This haul netted us fifteen large dace and a number of minnows, besides four brook trout,—blood spotted little fellows just the right size for the pan.

"That worked fine," jubilantly cried Worth, "but how shall we manage when everything is frozen up here? We can't net them through the ice."

"I have been thinking of that," I answered, "and I believe that if we get an old barrel and sink it in the deepest part of the brook so that there will always be water over it and running through slits in the sides, that minnows placed in it will not freeze, and will live for a long time."

"It's worth trying anyway. We must attend to it at once, before the brook freezes and the minnows disappear entirely." We carried the catch to camp and the trout were fired for our noonday meal. Then obtaining an old barrel from back of the mill, we cut some narrow slits along the sides, and carried it, together with some small traps, back to the brook, selecting a place where a small pool gave a depth sufficient to just cover the barrel. We sank it in the mud

with a large stone inside for ballast, and covered the top with boards. We beat up the brook again, taking more time at the operation and going a little further towards the head, secured a number of small fish. These were placed in the barrel and covered up securely for future use.

On either side of us, close under Nulhegan mountain, extended a marshy tract of small extent seemingly formed by springs and by occasional risings of the lake water. On the logs and dead trees lying about here, and in little runways through the tall grass, were numerous evidences of recent muskrat visitors. On different logs where these droppings were present, we placed traps close to the wet ground, chipping out a place with the axe where the log-end extended under water; and others were placed in the runways, covered with rotten wood, wet grass, and the like. No bait was used: potatoes, apples, or in fact any vegetable cut up would have been good bait for them, but we had none. The fish bait was intended for our mink traps at Big Averil Lake.

When we had completed this job and got back to camp it was beginning to grow dark. I

made haste to get the jack ready for our deer-hunt that night. This consisted of a candle placed in the end of a four foot stick, with a piece of refuse tin bent around it to act both as a shade and a reflector. We were tired but eager for the sport, and after supper we put off quietly and paddled with as much caution as the old batteau would allow past the deadwater and the shores close into the bank. The night was very dark and the silence profound. There was but little wind and this was in our favor as it prevented any waves from slapping against our clumsy craft and thus making an alarming noise. We went half the length of the lake without hearing anything and I was wondering whether we should ever be able to find the camp again in the darkness, when a faint sound was heard in front of us, seemingly close inshore. We stopped paddling to listen. A faint "click, clack" was audible, accompanied by a slight splashing sound.

"What is that?" whispered Worth, who was in the bow with the jack and gun.

"Dear walking in the water," I answered in the same low tone. "Hoofs striking the stones, I guess."

"Wait a minute; don't paddle until I get the jack lighted," muttered Worth in an excited tone. He struck a match, carefully shaded it with his hand, and got the candle lighted. We then looked eagerly ahead, but saw nothing of the deer. The water in front of the boat shone in the jack-light ink-black and without a ripple for a distance of two rods, where it blended into the darkness beyond. After waiting a few moments, we lifted our paddles with infinite care, and set them forward in the water, exerting just enough force to make the batteau move slowly ahead. In spite of our caution a slight slapping noise against the bows caused us to hold our breaths for fear the deer would take alarm. The sounds in front had ceased, but we kept steadily and very slowly forging ahead, skirting a narrow point which we gradually drew around.

A slight exclamation from Worth, instantly suppressed, drew my attention to two luminous greenish disks, as large as pennies, shining some ten yards off. At the same moment, a deer with short, branching antlers became visible, standing in the water with his head turned towards us and gazing in alarm at the flaring

light. His brown side was exposed to a point-blank shot, and Worth, who had the rifle ready, raised it and taking a slow and careful aim, fired. The echoing report crackled again and again over the silent lake and against the surrounding mountains, but did not drown the noise of a tremendous splash close in front of the boat, where the deer, on being hit gave a bound and then fell heavily into the shallow water, where he lay still.

"Got him!" shouted Worth. "Paddle fast, or we may lose him."

We put forth all our strength and had the batteau alongside in a jiffy, but the deer was past struggling. He had been shot through the body close back of the forelegs, and a few air bubbles arising from his submerged muzzle, were the only signs of remaining life. We managed to get the heavy carcass over the side into the boat and by the light of the candle, admired the young buck's graceful outlines and his soft, thick coat of brown-white hair.

"Too bad to kill such a pretty animal, Worth," said I regretfully, "but we must have meat."

"Too bad to do almost anything on this

earth," replied Worth, as we got the boat slowly moving back to camp. The light in the bow still flared fitfully in the cold night wind and barely illuminated the shore line which we had to follow closely in order to find our way in the dense blackness. Worth continued: "Food, clothing—all necessaries for human comfort cost, as a rule, some suffering to obtain them. But as for life among the wild things in this wilderness, what is it but a continual round of killing or being killed? All we can do is to avoid inflicting needless suffering in trying to live here. That's what I think! How far to camp now?" he asked abruptly, changing the subject.

"We must be quite near. Hallo, what's this?" I shouted, as a swishing about of something cold round my ankles attracted my attention. The bottom of the batteau was covered with rapidly rising water, and we hastily lifted our feet above its surface as we peered downward.

"There's a big leak here, Worth. Put for shore as fast as you can," I yelled. We plied the paddles with all our strength, and the unwieldy old boat slowly turned towards the

shore, getting heavier every minute as the water poured in. None too soon did her flat bows slide up on the margin of the lake, the after-part sinking level with the surface. We hastily leaped out, seized the torch, and examined the bottom.

"Board loose," I announced after a brief inspection. "The weight of the deer when we tumbled it in started it, I guess. We're in a pretty fix now." And indeed we were. It was not far to the camp, that we were certain of, but if we had to walk and to thread our way through the tangled woods, making a wide detour around the deadwater which we knew was close at hand it was not an inviting prospect, and perhaps a little dangerous besides, owing to numerous bog-holes which we might tumble into unawares.

"Got any nails in your pocket?" asked Worth. "We may be able to tighten up that old board so as to get back to camp by water."

"Not a nail," I announced, after examining the pockets of my heavy coat. "Perhaps there are some in the board; let's look." We lifted the deer out of the boat and laid it on the shore. The loose board was near the stern, and

to get at it we were compelled to haul the boat, full of water as it was, by slow degrees inshore, and it took all our strength to do it. Then by rapid bailing, we managed to reduce the volume of water sufficiently to turn the boat over. A six inch board was hanging loose from one side, and the rotting wood had allowed the nails to fall out, leaving two rusty holes where they had once been.

"Looks as if we'll have to walk it," observed Worth, looking dubiously at the line of woods hemming us in. "We must leave everything here and come back in the morning with a new piece of board and some nails."

"Hold on, Worth," I said, "can't we get a nail or two out of one of the seats?"

"That's the ticket! Funny I didn't think of that," responded Worth. "We'll fix the old board without trouble, after all." Searching the boat, we found a board in one of the seats which was loose and after a little prying with a stone, we forced it off. The nails in it were knocked out and driven into the bottom board so that it held, at least temporarily. The batteau was then shoved off carefully, the carcass of the deer deposited therein, and we made our

way slowly down the lake. Our candle by this time was burned down to a fragment and we paddled more by a sense of direction than from knowledge of where we were going.

Arriving in a few moments off the deadwater, we were apprised of our location by having the batteau bring up with a bang against a waterlogged white tree, whose naked branches poked us in the face. Backing out again, we skirted the swamp, and soon came abreast of the spot where the camp should be.

A dark mass looming up on shore proved to be the mill, and with a few vigorous strokes, the boat was sent up on the sawdust-covered shore close by. Lifting out the deer and taking it between us, we stumbled up the slope to the camp. We hung the carcass to a large tree, and after warming ourselves by a good fire, turned in to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

MINK AND OTTER

In the morning we set to work to skin and cut up the deer. It weighed perhaps a hundred and ten pounds and was lined with fat like a well-fed calf. We cut off some steaks for our breakfast, putting also in a pan a fine roasting piece of the saddle, which we covered with strips of fat pork, ready to cook for supper. The remainder, after much deliberation, was hung up inside the mill, where we felt sure the low temperature would keep it for a week or two without its spoiling. We were now ready to start for the prospective minking grounds on Big Averil, but before doing so, we thought to go around the deadwater and inspect our traps there. As we had hopes of finding some muskrats in them, Worth took along a short stout club, and I carried the canvas bag for the purpose of beating up the brook once more for minnows. We succeeded in getting a small school of fish, most of which we threw on the

bank to take over to Big Averil Lake, for the minks; the rest were put in the barrel.

Our first trap had been set in a small runway in the grass leading to the brook, where we had seen recent signs, but this trap proved to be unsprung. Within a few feet of it was another one placed on a log which rested partly in the water. As we approached this place a loud splash in the brook was heard. We hurried forward and saw swimming around the stake we had set in the muddy bottom, a muskrat whose black muzzle was just visible above the water. I grabbed the chain and hauled on it and a very large rat was brought up close to the log, which he immediately mounted and showed such a menacing front with his sharp teeth that we involuntarily started back. Worth leaning forward, however, struck him on the head with the club. The rat dropped into the water, but was immediately hauled out again and lay lifeless on the bank. He was a very large animal of his kind, weighing about three pounds, with a thick shining coat plastered to his body with water. We made the rounds through the swamp and along the brook, examining each trap, and found two more muskrats in them. The rest

of the traps had been undisturbed. Resetting the sprung traps, and moving others to more likely places, we returned to camp. The muskrats were here skinned by "casing" them; that is, by cutting each skin around the hind legs to start it, and stripping it over the animal's head.

This method permitted of the skins being dried easily on "stretchers"—narrow, wedge-shaped boards about six inches in width and three times as long, which were hung in the mill.

We took with us to Big Averil about twenty single spring traps for mink, and three or four double spring traps for larger animals, such as the otter which I believed lived on the outlet brook. Besides these animals, we thought a fisher or marten might find our traps in the woods, although we designed going much further back from the lake for them as soon as we should thoroughly learn the locality. A lynx, too, might very likely be in the neighborhood, although we had not seen or heard any.

We paddled down Little Averil and on the way dropped our troll overboard, with a spinner and one of the dead minnows for bait. This was decidedly more attractive to the trout than

the pork strip, for we hadn't gone a hundred yards before a strong yank drew my leg, to which the line was made fast, almost up to the gunwale. I dropped the paddle, pulled in the line by main strength, and a handsome lake trout of several pounds' weight came safely over the side. This was followed by another one almost as large, before we reached the dam.

At the head of the outlet we leaned over the dam for a few moments watching the froth-patched pool below. We could see moving slowly about or lying motionless close to the falling water, several large brook trout, and I determined to try for one of them with the hook and line. Cutting a long straight alder shoot, I trimmed it smooth and attached about thirty feet of line with a small hook baited with a fragment of white pork, which looked not unlike a species of grub. This I lowered quietly until it touched the water and then paid out line as it sank beneath. The water was so clear that we could see the trout eye the pork descending to them in a disdainful manner. Not one attempted to take it. Indeed, one trout on whose nose the bait landed, gave an impatient flick with his tail and moved his body away from it. I

tried several times, and it amused us to see the trout so scornful of our best efforts. I resolved to try again with different bait. They were noble fish, ten to fourteen inches long.

Taking our traps and bait, we descended to the bed of the stream, and walked along looking for the most likely spots in which to place traps. Both sides were rocky, and the brook in places wide and brawling along noisily. We saw few signs until we came to the curious looking path up the bank side which I had declared was an otter path, or slide. It led from the water in a slanting direction about six or eight feet up the bank and was made in smooth dirt. A long, fresh furrow, looking as if it had been turned over recently, was scratched along the middle as if made by some creature. In one or two spots near the path were tiny patches of coarse wood-grass, showing greener than the rest, and on digging into these, as I had once heard an old trapper advise, there was found unmistakable evidences of the recent visits of an animal, mingled with the bones and scales of fish.

"An otter for a thousand dollars," I said emphatically. "If we can get this fellow in a trap,

we will have a pelt which will be worth as much as any in these woods, I'm thinking."

"How about those large trout in the dam?" asked Worth, doubtfully. "An otter on this brook wouldn't leave many large fish in it, I am sure."

"He may be a recent arrival here—a wanderer. When the lumbermen were on the brook the otter was not here, that's certain; he has come since. Besides that, the walls of the pool are very rocky and underneath them are crevices where trout could hide securely if pursued by an otter, or mink either."

"It may be so. Try one of the No. 3 traps for him, then. What bait are you going to use?"

"No bait at all,—I'll show you a trick for otters." I took one of the paddles and in the centre of the path, half-way up the bank, I dug a shallow hole just the size of the double spring trap. In this I set the open-jawed contrivance, which fitted into it level with the surface, and carefully covered it with a layer of wood mould and fine earth. Smoothing off the place with the paddle until it was hardly distinguishable from the remainder of the path, I threw some water on and around the trap to remove the

scent. Every trace of our presence was removed in the best manner I knew how. Obtaining a stout pole the size of the chain ring, I slipped the chain over the butt and drove the pole into the ground close beside the path. The top of the pole was withed to another tree near it so that it held firmly, and the ring wedged on the butt with a piece of hard wood. The trap was now complete and we retreated to the stream and gazed up at our handiwork with critical eyes. Not an unusual sign gave evidence of our efforts and we silently put several hundred yards between us and the trap as we continued down stream.

At Big Averil we agreed to run a line of mink traps from the stream to the second brook, crossing several small rivulets on the way, and place a few traps on the latter stream which appeared to us to be very promising, owing to numerous little falls, overhanging banks, and small pools. Our first trap, a single spring affair just right for mink, was set on the bank in a cleft in the rocks. It appeared to be a natural landing place for an animal swimming to the shore. A little stone house was built, open on the front, and covered on the sides and top with rocks, so as to prevent

an animal from taking the bait except from the front. One of our fish, cut up in small pieces, was placed inside the house, well back from the entrance, and the trap in front under a light layer of wet grass. From this point at intervals of twenty rods or so and as straight as we could set them, we placed other traps, building in most instances a small house as we did on the brook, sometimes of stone, at others of pieces of bark or logs. Our drag of fish and flayed muskrats to attract the mink was slung on a slender branch and trailed along the ground between the traps. To find our line again easily, we cut notches in the trees.

On arriving at the second brook we had but five small traps left, and two of the larger ones. Our fish supply was exhausted and we had just enough rat meat to bait the remaining traps. The small ones were placed along the stream, and Worth volunteered to take the larger ones and strike a short line into the woods in the hope of catching a marten or lynx. He took some muskrat meat and set out while I sat down by the brook.

I had not been there long before a slight motion in the water within a few yards of me at-

tracted my attention. I looked intently and saw swimming against the current in the rapids a small, slender and sinuous form surmounted by a pointed, fierce-looking head. The animal arrived at a ledge of rocks bordering a small pool over which it rapidly scampered and plunged again into the water, swimming the pool, and emerging on the rocks within a half dozen feet of me. It was a mink and one of the most savage and ferocious little animals I ever saw. It stood on the rocks for almost half a minute looking about, its long undulating body furnished with short legs, and its gleaming, cruel little eyes roving this way and that as it turned its snaky head from side to side.

A slight motion on my part caused it to glance quickly towards me and it then saw me for the first time. One look was sufficient, for it turned round like a flash, ran over the rocks, and disappeared in a crevice above the water's edge. This was encouraging, as it showed that fur was to be had in the neighborhood; and on Worth's returning I informed him of the occurrence, at which he was jubilant. The large traps had been set and marked by "blazing" the trees so now we returned along the brook; but

at my suggestion we removed one of the small traps and set it just below the entrance to the mink hole at the head of the small rapids.

The lake lay motionless under a clear sky. The weather was cold but pleasant, and the morning mists still rolled up from the southern end. We stopped on the shore for a while, and wished for a boat to test the fishing here. Nothing resembling a boat of any kind was to be seen on the shores.

Going back again over the trail we reached the dam. The large brook trout were still to be seen at the base of the fall moving slowly about. I made up my mind to try for one of them that afternoon. We paddled down Little Averil and reached the camp. A hot fire was at once started for we had serious business on hand, viz.: to roast our saddle of venison for dinner. This required a good hot oven. When the meat had been put in, an appetizing odor diffused itself around the room. A pan of biscuits was also prepared and our two large lake trout cleaned and laid aside where they would keep fresh. We lived well in those early days of camping.

We had not taken time as yet to explore the

contents of the little cupboard in one corner, but now, while waiting for dinner, we got out the various bottles and packets and proceeded to open them. They consisted mostly of food-stuffs; mouldy beans, a quantity of stale pancake flour, and odds and ends of eatables which the cook who once presided there had scorned to make further use of. Some medicine bottles containing doubtful looking concoctions were unceremoniously thrown outside, but one glass jar labelled "Arsenic" in large letters, which we found on the top shelf and still containing perhaps a half pound of the poison, we allowed to remain where it was, speculating meanwhile on the probable uses to which it had been put. We concluded that it was intended for poisoning animals, perhaps lynxes, which had no doubt been abundant thereabouts at one time.

Dinner was ready in the course of an hour or so and a most appetizing meal it was. We voted deer-roast, hot biscuits and liberal libations of tea to wash all down with, as good a dinner as could be found in the woods, or perhaps anywhere else.

CHAPTER VIII

TRICKING A TROUT AND A NIGHT VISITOR

Back of the mill and on the edge of the clearing was an old horse-barn built of rough logs chinked with clay. It was in a broken-down state like all the outbuildings, with great gaping holes in the roof and sides. Within it were stalls for the teams, and scattered over the earth floor were heaps of straw and manure. Outside was a large pile of the same material, and on the edges of this heap or a little under it, I purposed to dig for earthworms as bait for the trout. These are hard to find in the woods; but where man has been, and especially domestic animals, turning up and enriching the mould, they are almost sure to make their appearance. Procuring from near the sawdust pile an old bent shovel, which had seen its best days years before, I set to work digging. The wriggling little creatures were at once brought to the surface in the clods, and I soon had a tin can half full. With these and our alder pole

and the line, we paddled to the dam. As we passed down the lake several black ducks rose in rushing flight from the centre, and flew like bullets to the far end, where they alighted with a splash which could be seen half a mile away.

"Recent arrivals here," quoth Worth; "late for them, too."

"They're on their way south, and won't stay long," I said. "We haven't a gun with us, of course. After this a rule of the camp will be that a gun must accompany every trip. What say?"

"Wish we had it in force before," answered Worth regretfully. When we neared the ducks, they rose again, circled round far from us to one side, and settled down again near the camp. They did not leave the lake, a fact which we noted with satisfaction.

The lazy trout were in their old place at the base of the fall, all with their heads turned upstream; and near them we perceived several large dace lying in a bunch. They were still, except for gently waving fins, and evidently waiting for something to turn up. The mild, open weather probably still allowed some food to reach them. Watching for a few moments with our heads

cautiously poked over the stone-work of the dam, I attached a fat wriggler to the hook and allowed the bait to drop gently among them. They took not the slightest notice of it, except, as it seemed to us, a slight cocking of their eyes as the worm dangled above them. They saw it, but appeared rather indignant than otherwise at the intrusion. I tried three times with the same result; they would have none of it, and I withdrew the bait in disgust. We took counsel together, and after some reflection, I said to Worth, "I have an idea. I will play an 'Injun' trick on them. Come away from here for a little while, and leave everything quiet. They'll forget all about the worms in a few minutes and then I'll see if I can't manage to get one or two of them."

We walked along the shore and watched the ducks. We could see them swimming about far down towards the camp like black specks in the glittering water. When I judged that the proper time had elapsed we went back to the dam, and I tried my experiment. Taking a lively worm from the box I leaned over and carefully let it fall just where it would sink over two of the biggest trout lying close to-

gether on the bottom. The worm, free from hook or line, struck the pool in the desired spot and began to sink slowly through the clear water, its head and tail writhing as if it had fallen out of a bank into the brook. We watched the result with interest. The worm sank a foot or two very slowly, showing white against the black water and at that point three of the dace rose off the bottom towards it, evidently intending to grab the morsel.

One of the big and watchful trout at once with a slanting rise, interposed between the dace and worm, drove the three fish down to the bottom, and then standing as it appeared on end, met the worm in its fall and swallowed it. The trout sank slowly again to the bottom of the pool alongside its mate and resumed its attentive, but quiet eyeing of the fall. Again I tried a worm, and the trout rose and took it in the same manner, but this time the dace, evidently cowed, remained below. The trick was now ready to be turned. I attached a worm to the hook very lightly by its middle, with head and tail moving as nearly as possible like the free worm, and let it sink. The trout came up for the third time, took the worm and the hook in its mouth and

turned to descend once more to the bottom, when I struck. A more startled fish never was caught. With a quick upward jerk, I lifted him out of the pool and by a side swing cast him on one of the rocky banks where he lay, giving little leaps in the air in his endeavor to regain the pool. We ran down and secured him—a beauty about a foot long, looking a perfect jewel with his blood-red spots and scarlet edged belly. I would have tried the same dodge again but the other fish had taken the alarm and fled into hiding. Not a trout or a dace was to be seen there.

There was nothing further for us to do at the dam and we paddled back to camp, intending to try a shot at the ducks, but they had disappeared, having gone, no doubt, over to Big Averil for a change. We thought we might be able to get a shot at them in the morning when we went to examine our traps.

We were aroused from sleep very late that night by a prolonged scratching and snuffling noise under the house, which, as I have described, was built on a stone foundation, leaving a considerable space between the ground and floor. It was in this cavity that the sound originated, and we sat up in our bunk in the pitchy

darkness listening with amazement, not unmixed with apprehension, to the racket going on beneath. Scratch, snuff, bump,—and then a gritting noise as if some large animal was trying its teeth on a hard substance with unsatisfactory results.

"Some caller on us, hey?" interrogated Worth, his voice sounding muffled from the effects of his recent sound sleep and a blanket bunched up around his head. "What on earth do you suppose it is?"

"Give it up; perhaps a lynx. Scat!" I shouted, seizing the shot gun which stood within reach of my hand. I pounded several times on the floor, and the noise below ceased for a moment, only to begin again, louder, if anything, than before.

"We'll have to investigate this," exclaimed Worth, springing out of bed. "No sleep for us to-night with that noise going on."

I followed, and we hurried on some clothing. Our fire was out, for we did not bother to keep it going during the comparatively mild nights which we had been having, and we lit one of our precious candles to explore outside.

The noise and thumping underneath continued. Our raps on the floor had produced no effect. Carrying the light and axe I led the way, followed by Worth with the shot gun. When we emerged from the house and stood in the chill night air we shivered slightly for we were none too warmly clad about the legs and feet. All was peaceful outside seemingly; the starry vault above us twinkled with a million diamonds, and the wind sighed mournfully among the trees. Beneath the house, however, as we rounded the corner facing on the timber road, a succession of bumps and rushes came to our ears. Worth with a commendable courage got in front of me with the gun so that the light would not dazzle his eyes if he had to shoot, and endeavored to peer through the crevices in the wall, but without success. We advanced slowly to where a large opening gave opportunity for a broad view and likewise for a sudden attack on us by the intruding beast if he was minded to do it.

Edging close to the wall I held the candle before me while Worth presented the shot gun and gazed beneath to catch sight if possible of our

disturber. "I see a black bunch of something over in one corner," he whispered.

"Does it move?" I asked.

"No. Now it does! It looks like a round ball of something. It isn't big enough for a lynx; shall I fire at it?"

"Safe to do so," I said. "Nothing here but wild things, and that fellow doesn't belong under there. Give it to him!"

Bang! A sheet of flame lit up the darkness of the cellar and the report seemed to rock the house. Immediately a thrashing around was heard underneath, and we hastily stepped back fully expecting to see some animal come tearing out.

But nothing showed up and in a few moments the noise ceased. We held the light in the opening and by its feeble rays made out a rolled-up form lying motionless on the ground, undoubtedly done for by the charge of shot. Everything now being quiet, Worth took the candle and stooping down entered the place. I heard him laugh, and a minute later he came out, dragging a large, bristling porcupine which, like all its tribe, was a great nocturnal wanderer. These creatures like nothing better than to explore

camps, cellars, barns and heaps of refuse, sampling all kinds of trash with their sharp teeth.

Worth handled the body gingerly, for fear of the sharp spines, and asked me what he should do with it. We allowed it to remain in the road for the night, and went back to bed.

Porcupines are of no use to anyone that I ever heard of.

Morning came clear and cold, th
at 42. We went down to the lake
Worth had a liking for a cold plung
gratified quite frequently. I was no
siastic about it, but kept him compa
occasion. We stripped in the sawmi
shivering run down to the shore, and
into deep water. Coming up with a
sive gasping, for the shock was great,
haste to shore again and raced back
clothes. Worth, however, swam abou
dent enjoyment for ten minutes or mor
clared it to be the finest plunge of the y
rubbed down and got into his chilly
A little of this went a great way with n

A warm breakfast soon set us

ceeded in getting away by biting its leg off. We were sorry to see this but there was no help for it unless we set spring-poles for each trap, and this was impracticable, the ground was so soft and wet. The rats were killed and taken to camp. We also took back some fish from the barrel; they were lively and in good condition. The five skins were stripped off in the mill, and tacked on stretching boards making with the others already hung up quite a promising beginning for us. The pelts were all fine and large.

We went in the batteau to the dam and descended the stream to the otter trap. As we approached the path or slide we moved silently, looking in the water for any signs of a swimming animal but saw none. On reaching the place, we inspected it from the other side of the brook, but to all appearance it had not been disturbed. We crossed on the stones and found everything as we had left it; no footprints or other traces of a visitor being visible on any side.

"Gone on a journey," commented Worth jocularly, "and the neighbors can't say when he'll be back."

"He'll be back when we least expect it," I

answered. "Leave everything as it is and if he is around this neighborhood at all, we'll get him yet."

We continued on to our first mink trap which we found empty and the bait intact. Before we had reached the next, however, most unpleasant odors assailed our nostrils. Worth held his nose with his fingers.

"Phew! A skunk!" he exclaimed in disgust. "Something has run across our trail or run foul of it, I might say. A fine fellow, though," he added, as he caught sight of him. And he was —a big skunk with a handsome coat of white and black fur, although I doubted if it would be worth much should any of the offensive discharge get on it. A tainted pelt may be hung up for a year and still retain decided traces of this most persistent odor. After some maneuvering, a lucky blow on the back close to the tail killed the animal and an examination did not disclose any damage to the skin which a little airing would not remove. Nothing else was found along the line in any of the traps, and this was a surprise to us as the country appeared wild and most promising for good results. Along the brook our remaining traps

were equally devoid of occupants, even to the one which we had set at the entrance of the mink hole. The bait of this trap, however, had disappeared, and this fact held out a ray of hope.

"I don't understand this," I said, sitting down on a log beside the brook; "some animal should have been attracted by all this bait scattered about the woods."

"Looks as if this country had been well trapped over," suggested Worth; "maybe last winter for all we know. Your remark about the otter being a newcomer here may have more significance than we think for, or is profitable to us. We may have need of more newcomers if we are going to be successful here."

"Nevertheless," I said, somewhat exasperated, "we shall continue this line until we strike something, if it takes a week. No one can tell me that every wild animal in these woods has been exterminated. It is just our luck, that's all."

"My sentiments, partner! You speak like a prophet of old—truth and wisdom flow from your lips," responded Worth cheerfully.

"I'll put some muskrat meat by this trap and try it again," I continued. "The mink has undoubtedly gotten out of the hole and stolen

the bait without getting caught. Let him try it again, that's all I ask." I rebaited the trap by putting some portions of the strong-scented rat close by the hole. On our return we dragged the carcasses over the trail again, to make the scent as strong as possible, and reaching the batteau set out for camp. No ducks had been seen on our journey down the lake, but I thought that I saw some of them in the water far away towards the camp. They looked like black specks, six or eight in number, and we resolved to get some of them if possible. Remembering how they had risen on our approach before, we thought to circumvent them this time by going towards them along shore well concealed from view for a short distance. Worth would remain in the batteau while I undertook to make a detour and come out on the shore again close to them. We figured that they would immediately take alarm and fly to the other end of the lake, affording Worth a chance for a shot as they passed. Accordingly I stepped out of the boat at a convenient spot and made my way, beset by briars and windfalls at every step, for half a mile through the woods. After I had gone so far I approached the shore and saw the

ducks sitting quietly on the water, or swimming slowly about occasionally ducking underneath in evident enjoyment. With a yell I darted from cover with a large pole in my hand and made a loud splashing noise in the lake. The ducks rose at once and flew low and straight for the dam. I watched their flight as they headed near to where I had left Worth in the batteau. A sudden wreath of smoke and then a dull report showed that he was on the alert. It was a good shot for I saw two ducks fall, while the others rose high in the air and continued on at express speed until they were out of sight towards Big Averil. I sat down to wait for the boat which soon came in view.

"Got two nice ones," called out Worth, stopping paddling and holding up two black, plump birds. "I had a fine chance at them. They flew within fifty feet and didn't see me until I shot."

"Good enough," I answered. "Come and take me aboard. A starving man might want to make a journey through this slashing every day but I don't care for it myself." Worth laughed and volunteered to undertake it next time. Taking up our paddles we soon arrived at camp.

We had a pan of baked beans and generous portions of deer meat for dinner, also hot biscuits and tea. We fared well. We worked the rest of the afternoon fashioning stretcher-boards of various sizes out of shingles and pieces of board. The muskrats were doing finely—nice skins, but they wouldn't bring us much. We wished they were mink.

CHAPTER X

A SABLE INTRUSION

A little after daylight the next morning we were awakened by a commotion outside. Somebody seemed to be stamping around the premises a short distance away, giving vent to a stream of talk. We listened and a voice was heard to exclaim in a kind of gibberish:

"Come out o' dar, you men! Show yoursel's, I say. Ain't you up yit, ye lazy houn's?"

We lay still for a few moments silently wondering at this strange interruption, and speculating as to whether the language which we heard was meant for us. It was by no means complimentary. At a more energetic command from outside to get up, we jumped out of our bunk, ran to the door and threw it open. An odd-looking figure met our gaze—an old colored man, dressed in the most tattered clothing imaginable, and with a woe-begone countenance, which was distorted into a kind of angry grin. He stood near the edge of the woods.

His eyes rolled as he saw us appear, and he held up one of our traps with a fine mink in it, dead and hanging downwards. He tapped the limp form of the animal savagely with a club as he resumed his soliloquy in this manner:

"What all did mean? Cuss me if I ebber hear of such imperence. Trappin' mink in a man's backyard dis away. Where you come from, men?"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Worth indignantly. "Tell me whose backyard have we been trapping in?"

At this the darkey waved his club in an uncertain fashion back of him towards the lake. "My backyard is whar you folks put yo' traps. I heerd you men talkin' on de brook yesterday, and dis mornin' I found dis yere trap wid de mink in it, back of my cabin. I lives dere, men, and dat brook is in mah backyard. What you livin' here for anyway?"

The harmless looking old fellow cut such a comical figure with his black face and bent form as he stood there catechising us in this most truculent manner, which was entirely out of keeping with his dilapidated and feeble condition, that we could not help giving vent to a

loud laugh of relief and enjoyment. The old man regarded with amazement our apparent indifference for a few moments, and then his face gradually lighted up. Our merriment seemed to be contagious, and he soon gave a loud guffaw.

"Yah, yah, yah!" he roared, dropping the mink and trap, and opening a toothless mouth in a terrific grin, "berry pleasant gem'men, surely. What you laugh at ole nigger for, dat's what I want to know, men?"

"Come here, uncle," exclaimed Worth, after he had recovered his gravity somewhat. "Where do you live round here; on the brook?"

"No, sah, no, sah!" answered the old man, drawing a little way towards us. "I live on Big Averil Lake, close by de brook. Mah cabin it sets in de woods apiece back from the lake; berry cold place dere in winter, gem'men, for sure."

"I suppose it is, and windy, too," said Worth. "How long have you lived there, uncle?"

" 'Bout two years, I reckon. I used to work for de sawgang here. I was cook in dis berry place 'fore dey shet down de mill. A good cook I is, too."

"And you have been living on the lake all alone since then?" inquired Worth.

"Not all the time, sah. Dey ben shet down 'bout five years. I wuked in a camp way over at West Stew'tstown, a long spell, but I come back yere 'bout two years ago, as I done tole you."

"How are you getting along?" I asked, an idea dawning on me which shed light on the dearth of game close about our camp. "Do you trap here?"

"Starvin' to death, dat's how I'se a-gettin' along," replied the negro promptly. "To tell you Gawd's truth, gem'men, I ain't had a good sqar meal in a month o' Sundays. I could eat dis mink if I had him skinned and put in the pan." The old man had gradually approached the door, and by this time stood before us in an attitude of humility, not unmixed with a certain native dignity as he uttered these last words, which exposed the last desperate straits to which a man can come.

"I trapped here de fust winter all round the big pond and most everywhar round dis yere little one, an' I done fust rate. But dis fall I got de rheumatiz pretty bad—can't trap, can't hunt,

—I only got five traps left, anyways, all de odder ones done broke to pieces an' I couldn't trap much if I wanted to."

"In that case I don't see how you live here at all. How do you get anything to eat?" I asked.

"What I gits to eat ain't much. I sets snares for rabbits an' squirrels close by de cabin an' I gits one now an' then, and I catches a fish sometimes. But when it gits stormy an' I can't go out I lays in de cabin for days and don't git nothin' to eat 'tall."

We regarded the old man with pity. "Haven't you got a gun? I should think you could shoot something near your cabin door—deer, or a partridge, for instance,—without much trouble," said Worth.

"Got an ole gun, but no powder and no shot. I ain't used a gun for goodness knows how long. I mos' forgit how to handle one by dis time."

We were pretty well chilled by this time from standing so long scantily attired at the open door. We consulted together in an undertone for a moment, meanwhile eyeing our strange visitor with a strong desire to help him. His story sounded truthful, and his wrinkled black

face and gray head looked to us honest as the day.

"Come in, uncle," called out Worth hastily, "and if you don't get a good breakfast this morning I'll never eat another myself."

"Thank yo' kindly, sah! But I don't wish yo' to distu'b yourselves for a poor ole colored man like me."

"Come in, come in," repeated Worth with impatience. "Sit down by the stove. I'll have a fire in a minute."

The negro came slowly inside and sat down on the bench while Worth skipped about, got chunks of wood in the stove and lighted, which soon sent out such a heat that the old man rubbed his hands with enjoyment and looked on with interest at the preparations proceeding rapidly for breakfast. I ran out to the mill for some meat from the deer, and Worth mixed a big pan of biscuits and set them to bake in the oven. Boiling tea, and fried pork completed the breakfast. When all was ready we invited the old fellow to eat. He ate as a hungry person might, but not greedily. His gentle manners, and especially his soft slurring southern accent, showed that he was from below Mason and Dix-

on's line and that he was not a Canadian or northern darkey whom the air of freedom had spoiled in the regeneration.

"Most appetizin' food, gem'men," he exclaimed after his need had been somewhat satisfied. "I declar', I ain't had no fried po'k in a long time; it sems like old times, 'deed it does."

"Glad you like it," replied Worth, hospitably. "Have some more biscuits?"

"No mo', sah, thank ye kindly. I'se had just a s'fficiency, sah; couldn't hold no more widout bustin' mahself"—this with a loud laugh, and the old man leaned back on the bench.

While washing up the dishes, a task which the old man insisted on sharing by doing the drying part on an old towel, he exclaimed in a serious tone:

"I'd like to know your names, gem'men. You done a poor man a sarvice—a wunnerful good deed, men, an' I wish to know your names, if you please."

We told him, also where we came from, and what our errand was, all of which he received in respectful silence. We asked in return to know his name.

"Sassenger," he responded, promptly. "I ain't got no oder name—just Sassenger."

"Queer name," muttered Worth. "I never heard one like that before."

"No, sah, I don't s'pose you did," said the negro, quick to catch the remark. "Dat's what ebberybody say, but dat's mah name an' of course, I can't change it."

"Of course you can't, it's a good enough name. Did you say you trapped round here all last winter, Sassenger?" Worth inquired, as he hung the frying-pan on a hook behind the stove and tidied up the table a little.

"All around Big Averil, and some round dis yere pond. Last spring I trapped too, but dey give out on me an' I couldn't get round much anyways, so I gib it up."

"That explains why we don't have better luck," I said, "all the game was taken out of the woods before we came here."

"Mister, I'se gwine to tell yo' somethin'," said Sassenger impressively. "Round yere I wouldn't trap if I was you, but—you know whar Nulhegan mountain is?" he inquired.

"Certainly!" I answered.

"You take up your traps from whar dey is an'

run a line from de foot of the mountains straight back to de ridge an' along de ridge as fur as you kin go. Dat ridge it runs down into a swamp agin—lemme see—'bout six, seven miles from de mountain, and just whar it dips down dere is a clearin'. From dere you can see the smoke on Big Averil berry plain. Dat's whar yo' gwine to stop; yo' understan' me?"

"I do. Have you trapped there, Sass?"

"I never sot a trap in dose regions, an' far as I know, nobody ebber has. I was a suspectin' to set some traps dere dis winter if I got a chance, but I guess I won't get none."

"You think there is game there?" queried Worth, his eyes sparkling with anticipation.

"I know dere is," replied Sassenger with emphasis. "I seen tracks, an' I seen de animiles demselves. I seen martens dere; and mink are on de brooks in plenty. Bob-cats in de woods, too."

"Good enough," ejaculated Worth. "We will run a line there, 'ere another sun has set,' as the poet says. Want to come and see our muskrat traps now, Sass?"

"I sure does, sah," replied the darkey with a loud laugh.

"Come on then—hallo, I forgot that mink you brought here. Where did you find him?"

"Gem'men," replied Sass in a shamefaced manner, "please to pahdon old man for distu'bin you dis mawnin' in sech a scan'alous manner. I foun' de trap on mah brook by a hole, an' it had a mink in it, an' I says to mahself, 'dem no-account Canuck fellers aroun' here agin.' Dey comes here once a year from Canady, an' dey shoots an' traps eberyting dat dey lays eyes on."

"When were they round here before?" querried Worth, as we got on our heavy coats, took the shot gun from the corner and sallied forth.

"Dey was round last winter; went down Big Averil on de ice, and over to'ds West Stew'ts-town. I heered dem in de woods a shootin' an' a bangin fur most a month."

"Did they bother you any while they were here?" I inquired.

"Dey saw me on de lake once or twice an' cussed me somethin' awful; called me good fur nothin' ole nigger. One of dem pointed his gun at me an' tole me to git to—out o' dis yere country fur it belonged to dem."

"Pleasant neighbors," commented Worth. "I hope they don't come along this winter."

"Dey are most certain to be round agin when snow comes and dey can draw sleds. Dey trap furs an' send dem down to Montreal most ebery year."

"What makes you think no one had trapped along the ridge back of Nulhegan, Sass?" I asked, as we went past the deadwater and approached the swamp at the foot of the mountain.

"Because de ole sawgang dat was yere years ago wouldn't have no truck wid any of dem Canady fellows, an' drove 'em out mos' ebery year when I cooked in dis camp, and de Canucks hab nebber been in dere. Don' know if dey won't come agin though, mos' any time now."

We found four rats in the traps. The little creatures were plentiful in the swamp, but Sass advised us to take up most of the traps and use them in running our "saple" line along the ridge, for we stood a chance of getting more valuable fur in that way. He also said that we must build deadfalls here and there, baited with muskrats carcasses. We did not have a sufficient number of steel traps for our line. The deadfalls, in his opinion, were the surest and best way to take the larger animals for it killed

them instantly and did not spoil the fur; only we must be sure to examine the traps frequently for fear of some preying animal eating the game or tearing the skins to pieces.

Sass killed the muskrats for us. His manner of doing so was peculiar. Watching his opportunity he stood in front of a big rat which eyed his every move and bared its sharp teeth in a menacing manner at every attempt to seize it, he made one or two feints with his hands and then cleverly seized the rat by the back of the neck. Holding it firmly he turned the animal's belly towards him and with his left hand grasped its windpipe with a vice-like grip. The rat struggled a little then grew limp and seemed to collapse and die in less than a minute. He treated all the animals in the same manner and explained that it was the best way as they were so soft and full of blood that a crack on the head was apt to soil the fur unless one was very careful,—trouble which had occurred in our experience.

We beat up the brook again for minnows and secured a large number which seemed to have run in from the lake since our last visit. Sass was much interested in our barrel contrivance

for keeping them, and peered down into it with a chuckle.

"Some dead ones in dere," he exclaimed, forking them out with his fingers, "but dey is jest as good fur baitin' traps. If you kin keep some alive through de winter you'll have some spo't fishin' through de ice fur pickerel."

"Any pickerel in these waters?" I asked in surprise. "I thought there was only trout in the lake."

"Lots of pickerel—whoppin' big ones, in Wallis Pond 'bout four miles from yere," responded Sass. "We kin git dere easy when the cold comes by crossin' Big Averil on de ice. Dat lake freezes up early ebery year."

On our return to camp we skinned the rats and the mink. The latter skin was a fine one, very dark and lustrous, and we were elated when we had it stretched on a board and added to our stock. Sass's rheumatic limbs demanded a rest for a while and we put off examining our other traps until afternoon, filling in the time by preparing stretching-boards of a larger size to accommodate the skins of martens and fishers which we hoped to get on the new line Sass had advised us to run.

CHAPTER XI

SASS'S CABIN

After dinner we started for the dam. We hooked a trout on the way but lost him. Sass marveled at our trolling outfit; said he had never seen such a thing before as he always fished with a single hook and minnow, but had not had much luck lately,—he thought it due to the lateness of the season. Worth told him that the fish sought the deeper waters on the approach of cold weather and fishing should be done further out in the lake. We went down the bank to the otter trap; nothing was disturbed there. Sass on inspecting the place gave it as his opinion that there surely was an otter in the vicinity although he had seen none since he had been in the woods. The path up the bank he believed to be made by such an animal and the other signs appeared to be conclusive.

We left there and went along our line of mink traps. A mink was caught in one; he had evidently been making his way from one brook to

another, and the scent of the muskrat drag had attracted him along the line. Sass killed him with the club. In answer to a question from Worth, he said he could kill mink, too, with his hands, and often did so, but they were more savage than the rats and he did not like to do it. He claimed that he caught snakes in the same way,—by seizing them from behind by the neck, and had as many as four or five bites on his hands at one time from large blacksnakes, but they had never hurt him any. He pointed out at the further brook the place where he had found the mink, and it proved to be the hole where I had seen the animal enter.

"Whereabouts is your house, Sass?" inquired Worth, when we had reached the end of the line and taken up most of the traps, leaving only four or five in that section. "Where did you hear us talking the other day?"

"Right yere on dis brook. Mah house is dis away towards de lake. You see dis li'l trail? Dat's mah track. You set one ob dem big traps in it and you catch an old darkey—yah! yah! but his hide ain't wuth much, an' dat's a fac'."

"Your cabin must be quite near, if you can hear voices on the brook from it," I said.

"Quite clus. Come along, gem'men, an' visit mah domicile, if you will be so kind, please."

We accompanied him along the path. The trail was so small and hidden in the bushes that we had not noticed it before. After a few minutes' walk we came to a small hut built in the woods. It was made of logs laid lengthwise with large poles placed between the joints to make it tight and a roof composed of planks, shingles and other materials that would shed more or less water. A short distance in front we saw the waters of Big Averil, but the cabin was so hidden among the trees that one might have passed along the lake a dozen times without seeing it. In this place, Sass informed us, he had passed the whole of the preceding winter and been comfortable there. A rusty old stove was inside. He had got this from somewhere,—an abandoned lumber camp, probably,—and there was no lack of wood around for fuel. Some log ends supporting poles in one corner of the room and covered over with spruce boughs formed a bed. These, with a rude table and a three legged stool to match it, comprised all of his household furniture.

When we had looked around attentively we

were sorry that we lost the trout we had hooked on the way down the lake, for of food in the interior of the hut we saw absolutely nothing. It was a mystery to us how the old man lived; he certainly was too feeble to make his own living by ranging the woods; but he assured us he was well able to do so if only the confounded rheumatism would let up on him, and he added that he had feasted so well that day he would need nothing further in the way of food for some time to come. If he did, he had some snares set in a slashing which would surely get him a rabbit or a partridge by the time he needed it.

This sounded somewhat dubious to us and we resolved to supply him on the morrow with a small stock of pork, meal and meat. These things we thought we could easily spare; from our success so far with gun and line, we had no fear of not being able to get additional game at any time. It was a good game country; deer and fish, rabbits, partridges and ducks were around in numbers and would remain, except the ducks, for most of the winter. The only creatures which seemed to be scarce in the neighborhood were the small fur animals that

we had come to trap; and for this condition we had Sass to thank. The poor fellow had his own living to make, however, and a miserable one it evidently was at best. He had made amends so far as he could for our disappointment by informing us of a good trapping ground and we were grateful for this. When we had taken our leave and started for the camp, we had gone but a short distance when we heard him calling for us to stop, and he soon came in sight, hobbling hastily along. He held up a small bottle containing a yellowish, oily liquid and this he pressed into Worth's hands.

"I mos' forgot dis berry impo'tant article, gem'men; you needs it. You ain't got anything to scent your traps with, has you?"

"Nothing except the drag—, muskrats and fish," replied Worth.

"Dat's all berry well, but dis yere am fish oil, an' dere ain't nothin' to beat it fer attractin' mos' ebery animile in de woods. Put jes' a li'l on your boots when you walk your line, an' a drap or two on each trap when you set it. If any weasel animiles smells dis, or mebbe a fox or a fisher, dey'll foller it till dey comes to de traps, ebery time."

"What is it made of, Sass?" Worth inquired, uncorking the bottle and smelling its contents. "Phew! pretty strong whatever it is."

"Dat's minnow oil. I makes it in de summer-time. I jes' put some pieces of fish in a bottle with a little water and hang it in de sun for two or three weeks. Dat makes an ile wuth more'n bait for traps. Jes' you wait and try it and you'll see."

"Thank you, Sass. A trick like that is worth knowing. We shall use it to-morrow; it smells strong enough, though, to attract an elephant."

"Yah, yah! no elephuns in dese yere woods, Mister Wuth, at leas' I nebber met up wid one."

Sass went back to his shack and we resumed our way to the outlet brook, following this to the dam and thence in the batteau to camp. We got another shot at the ducks on the way. They were in the middle of the lake and did not rise until the batteau was within long range, and then they flew in a line close along shore, bound for the upper end of the lake. As they passed, Worth let drive with the shot gun, and one duck dropped in the water, quacking dismally; the others kept on with undiminished speed. We

paddled over and secured the bird, which had its wings broken. We wrung its neck.

The mice in the loft had been bothering us each night since we had been in the boarding house by running about and gnawing on the timber overhead, often keeping us awake, and now they had invaded the lower story, nibbling at our stock of beans, meal and flour. One morning we found nearly a cupful of beans, half-eaten, scattered over the floor, some being carried half way up the rickety stairs to the nests in the loft. This was getting too serious a matter and we debated how to end the nuisance. I finally thought of the arsenic jar in the cupboard, and we prepared some pellets of dough mixed with the poison; these were scattered about the floor at night. They had a good effect and they rid us of a large number of the rodents.

On a bright and pleasant morning we got ready to run a long line of traps through the woods as suggested by Sass. Nearly our entire stock of steel traps was assembled, about thirty-eight of them, of various sizes, mostly small, but there were ten double spring traps which we thought would hold any animal that ranged the forest, not excepting a wolf if there should be

one, although we calculated to build nearly twice as many wooden traps of the "deadfall" variety; and this promised to be no small task. Worth shouldered half of the load, also the shot gun and a bundle of pine splints to make the sticks and spindles for the deadfalls, while I loaded on my back the remainder of the traps, took the axe in one hand, and all the muskrat carcasses we had left in the other. We planned to stop at the deadwater to look at the traps there and to get some fish out of the barrel. We doubted if we would have bait enough for all the traps. As we would in all probability be gone most of the day, we stuffed some biscuits and fried deer meat in our pockets and thus equipped set out.

At the swamp at the foot of Nulhegan we found the traps had done good work for us; all but one held muskrats. There were hundreds of the little creatures in the mucky place and had their skins been of much value we should have done well enough by confining our efforts to obtaining them alone; but as they fetched only about twenty cents apiece in the market, whereas a mink skin was worth four dollars, a marten about the same, and a fisher would bring eight

dollars, we could not waste our time on the rats. Besides it was child's play; we wanted to see some of the rarer denizens of the woods, to study them in their haunts, and to match our wits with theirs and circumvent them. We skinned the rats, caught and hung the pelts on a convenient tree, adding the bodies to our drag; also took most of the fish from the barrel, leaving a few lively minnows for our trout and pickerel fishing later on.

Our route now lay along one side of the swamp and around Nulhegan mountain up on to a ridge that ran about northwest into Canada. We knew the international line was very near, perhaps two miles from camp, but there was nothing but woods in that direction for more distance than any man had yet measured, we judged. Further up in Canada, located here and there in peaceful smiling valleys and clearings, were the houses and little villages of the "habitans"; and scattered along the roads were their log farmhouses and barns, but all about us lay a deep wilderness. Once you were lost in the immense stretches of primitiveness and silence there, you realized that Nature and not man still held sway in that country.

After we got round the swamp we saw before us the rise of ground or ridge which Sass had spoken of, situated in a region we had not visited. Woods covered the country to the north and ended on the steep sides of Nulhegan. The mountain's rocky ledges rose from the shore of the lake in stern grandeur and as we looked up we saw, circling the summit, a large bird, distinctly visible in the clear air of the morning but too far away for the eye to discover what kind it was. We watched its slow and graceful movements a long time,—first a curving glide on almost motionless wing in one direction, then a pause as if the huge bird were examining something below with great attention, followed by a gliding flight to complete the circle, and then another pause. It finally disappeared from view towards Big Averil. We concluded that it was an eagle.

We set our first trap on the side of the ridge opposite the swamp. We made a little cuddy, or house of bark and stones, put a piece of muskrat under it, also small pieces under the trap which was placed at the entrance. Before leaving, we put two or three drops of the fish oil on the trap. We put some of the oil on the

soles of our heavy shoes, now that we were about to form a line, and taking our drag walked along the ridge several hundred feet where we built another trap, this time a deadfall. To make this, we secured two heavy logs, placed one lengthwise on top of the other and fixed them in place by stakes driven in the ground on each side. Close alongside, we built the bait house into which the trigger of a "figure four," made of splits which Worth whittled out, was set. The top log, supported by the stem of the "figure four," was now ready to fall at the least tug on the trigger holding the bait. Between the traps I blazed two trees to guide us in relocating them, and our drag formed a scented connection between them.

"What is the object of following this ridge in setting the traps, Worth?" I asked as we proceeded on our way. "I should think down in the valley would be a good place—rather sheltered and retired there."

"It probably would be a good place," answered Worth, "but my idea is that this ridge is a dividing line between two valleys and the animals in one hollow are constantly crossing and dropping down into the other. That be-

ing the case, any of them striking our trail, strongly scented with fish oil and muskrats, on the ridge are apt to follow it up and get caught."

"I see. We get a chance at the inhabitants of both valleys by trapping between them. Sound scheme, apparently."

"I don't know if that is the real reason but it is the one which looks most plausible to me," added Worth. "Here's a queer looking place. What do you make of this?"

A fallen spruce with heavy withered top lay before us. Its butt end had a deep cavity in it, half concealed from view by a tangled mass of roots and torn up earth. In front of the entrance to the hole the dirt appeared to be beaten flat by the feet of some animal. It had every appearance of being the den of some wild creature.

"Great place for a trap there or I'm much mistaken; put a double spring in there, Worth," I said.

We did so, and to secure it we drove a stake alongside the tree over which we slid the chain ring. The chain was just long enough to reach into the cavity. We covered the trap with rotten wood after placing a piece of muskrat un-

der the treadle. Small pieces of fish scattered inside the hole made it look so promising here that we left with mighty high hopes of getting something without fail.

Partridges, alarmed by our coming, started up on the ridge and flew off with a clatter to right and left. We debated whether we should try to get some of them, rather fearing the effect of firing a gun along our trapping line. As, however, we came to the conclusion it would do but little harm, watching his opportunity, Worth dropped a fine bird at close range in the thickets. In the intervals of setting traps we secured three more by quick shooting either on the wing or when we saw a bird sitting close in a bush.

To some of our steel traps we attached a spring pole to guard against the animal's gnawing a leg off in its efforts to get free, also to keep it from being destroyed by other animals. We drove a pole in the earth or bent down a young sapling over the top of which was slipped the chain ring, and secured it by a notched stick. The effect of this would be to hoist a struggling animal in the air out of reach of marauders.

After we had followed the ridge several miles we saw in the valley below a rapid little stream,

seeming to come from between the hills nearby and flowing away from Big Averil Lake perhaps to Wallis Pond, of which we had heard. Little rocky pools and small rapids along its course made us think that it might be a good place for mink and we descended to the valley to look about us. It was an ideal wild spot—the brawling and gurgling brook tore along with fallen trees bridging its channel in places and then under piles of brush ten feet high which it was almost impossible to climb; or it meandered through lightly wooded park-like openings only to chafe and fret its way below through rocky fastnesses that none but the wildest creatures could have ever explored. We set ten small traps along this brook in crevices among the rocks, marking the spot where we had descended to the valley by a broad notch on a tree.

During the rest of the day we built and set traps along the ridge to the number of about fifty, and kept busy until night. We were so occupied with our task that time had flown by unheeded. We had eaten no lunch, and only by a waning light in the woods did we realize that we should have to spend the night where we were as it was clearly impossible for us to

return to camp that day, the distance was at least five miles. Sass had told us the ridge was six or seven miles long and we had not yet come to the end. But we did not go much further before we noticed the ground beginning to descend in front of us and a thinning of the trees beyond disclosed more and more of a darkening skyline. This was evidently the end of our line and we prepared to camp. We had no blankets but with a good fire we could get through the night with comparative comfort. Selecting a sheltered spot under a rocky ledge we built a fire, ate our supper and lunch combined, and too tired for much talking, snuggled down on our bough beds and dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE RIDGE

Once in the night I rose to replenish the fire and saw Worth curled up like a hedgehog to keep warm. Before I dozed off again a distant screech rent the air. It seemed to come from far along the ridge, and I wondered if it was made by some animal caught in a trap. At early dawn we were awake, shivering and yawning. We ran about for a few minutes to warm up. On stepping out of the line of the woods, to the end of the ridge where it was entirely bare except for some huge boulders, we saw before us a sea of woods stretching for miles to where, against the dark background of mountains, the smoke was rolling up in the cold mountain air from Big Averil. As the bird flies, the lake was fully five miles from us, but by way of the ridge and valley it was probably more. We plucked and spitted two of the partridges before the fire for breakfast, but soon found out that they were

not very palatable, as we had neither pepper nor salt.

"Limber up now," commanded Worth, lifting his feet in a sort of marking-time movement. "Get your muscles working for we've got some tramping to do this morning."

"I'm ready for it," I replied. "Shall we go along the line of traps on our way back, or put straight for camp?"

"I don't think we ought to stop; hardly time yet for anything to get caught." But I told my comrade of the screech I had heard in the night and he shook his head doubtfully.

"Sounds as if some big animal had got caught," he said. "Maybe we'll hear something further from him on our way back." We struck down the side of the ridge a little ways to where it was more open, and made our way for a good distance. Nothing was heard from above along our line, and we came to the conclusion that the wild yell which I had heard was not connected with our operations. We struck our notches leading down to the brook at the beginning of our line of mink traps. As we wanted a drink of the cold running water, also to look at one or two of these traps, we descended to the bed of the

stream. We drank long and deeply of the clear water. Within a few feet of us was a mink hole, or what appeared to be one, and a trap which we found unsprung. The pieces of muskrat bait were untouched. Going along the bank we came to the next trap. This had been set between two rocks and on our examining the place no trap was to be seen. A search, however, showed the chains attached to it leading down into the deep water at the base of the rocks. We tugged at it for a few minutes until it suddenly came loose and we hauled up a mink, dead as a doornail. It had evidently got caught sometime during the afternoon or night and at once diving frantically off the rocks, entangling the chain in some obstruction underneath, it had thus drowned itself speedily.

We took it out of the trap and laid it on the rocks—a beautiful dark fellow with a thick coat of soft shining fur.

"Worth any man's four dollars," quoth my partner, admiringly. "This seems to be a good place for them. What shall we rebait with? We haven't any more fish or muskrat."

On removing the stone cover from our little house, we found a piece of bait in it that the

mink had been after and failed to reach, and with this we reset the trap, covering it with feathers plucked from one of the partridges. We sprinkled a few drops of fish oil over all, and went along the brook examining two or three more traps but found nothing in them, and then went upon the ridge preparing to start straight for camp. When we had got to the top we stood for a few moments taking our bearings and looking around, and as we did so we heard as well as felt a short smothered sound—a concussion of the air which seemed to come from a great distance apparently from the direction of the lakes. We looked at each other inquiringly.

"What was that, think?" I asked Worth, "sounded like someone slamming a big door."

"No houses off there in the woods," answered Worth, as if I didn't know that as well as he did. "Tree fell, I guess; sound carries far up this valley."

It was a mysterious sound of the wilds, like all the noises one hears there. Sometimes we heard little whining cries come from remote places in the woods or from the mountains, sounding to us like a big bear cub whimpering; or a screech such as I heard in the night would

make us start up from sleep and listen a long time fearing and wondering,—speculating as to its cause in that brooding stillness.

We reached the deadwater about noon, and looking after our traps there, found three rats caught and took them to camp.

We saw Sass tramping up and down on the little porch, waiting for our return. As soon as he saw us his face expanded into a broad grin.

"Bless your souls, men," he exclaimed, "whar you been? I mos' think you got lost. Got some game, hab yo'? Dat's good! All ob dem traps done set along de ridge?"

We told him that they were and that we felt convinced it was an excellent place for fur animals, as he had said.

"Deed it is," replied the old man. "You'll sure get 'em on dat saple line. Nex' time you go, howeber, you want to run dat line right over to Big Averil through de woods. Dat'll give you a berry long line an' you'll be nearer home when you gets to de end ob it, too."

We were too tired to talk about it much, and somewhat footsore to boot, so we were glad to go inside and rest. Sass bustled around, got some pork frying, and made a big pail of boil-

ing tea. He proudly showed us two large lake trout he had caught with live minnows for bait while we were gone, using our batteau to go out on the lake.

For the rest of the day we lounged about the camp. We inspected our skins drying in the mill; they were doing finely. In a few days we could remove them to the loft overhead where they would be safer, and could stay all winter, curing.

Next morning we awoke stiff and sore. Worth had developed a blister on one of his heels which bothered him a great deal, due to the rubbing of a hard leather counter. We had to put off the journey along our line for another day. Breakfast over, we took the shotgun and rowed down the lake to try for a few ducks. A large flock, fully fifty of them, were paddling about in the centre, far from shore—new arrivals, probably resting for a few hours in this convenient spot preparatory to a long flight that night, southward. By manœuvering the clumsy boat we got within two hundred yards of them before they rose. Then a hundred wings beat the air with a long, rolling sound and they shot straight up in a bunch stretched out in a line,

and passed us far to one side towards the lower end of the lake. It was a long shot but Worth's gun cracked and the heavy charge tore into the middle of the line with sufficient force to drop two of them. They fell quacking into the water. The rest mounted high in the air, further and further, until they were only black dots in the clear morning sky. We watched them for a few minutes regardless of the wounded birds fluttering about. The flock wavered at a high altitude for a few seconds, bunched together, apparently holding a conference, then separated, half of them flying in a wedge-shaped formation southward, the others mounting higher until they were barely discernible. Then they made a slow circular turn and in the space of a few feet disappeared bodily into the sky.

For some moments we remained gazing in astonishment at the spot where we had last seen them, but they did not reappear.

"Don't understand that," quoth Worth in a puzzled manner. "How in the world could they go out of sight so quickly in a clear sky. Are they too far up to be seen with the naked eye?"

"Maybe so, or perhaps there is a haze or vapor up there which conceals them from view."

"They're off, that's certain; they will reach the banks of the Hudson by nightfall if they keep going. Let's get those ducks before they leave, too."

The wounded birds were vainly endeavoring to raise themselves, fluttering and quacking mightily as they circled around. We quickly secured them and stowed them in the boat. No more ducks were seen on the lake during the whole season. Their fall flight from the frozen north was over for that year, and thereafter the lake was unruffled by webbed foot or by pinion until it lay silent for the winter under a broad sheet of ice.

CHAPTER XIII

DEATH OF THE OTTER

We continued on to the dam and set out along the stream hoping to find the otter trap sprung and that wary animal in it. Even to discover signs would have been encouraging, but up to the present nothing had occurred to confirm our belief in the otter's presence on the stream. When we reached the pool where the trap was we moved silently and peered over the rocks at the other side. The path still lay bare and smooth just as we had left it. After inspecting it and the surroundings for some moments we walked boldly along the bank and sat down on a log a few feet back from the bank for a rest. We had been again disappointed. Worth nursed his heel and I sat sunk in disgruntled silence, gazing at the smooth water before me. All at once I saw coming up the bed of the stream from the lake and swimming with its head just above water what looked like a big black dog. It had a short, blunt nose and small,

flat ears set wide apart on its head. It made a rippling wake after it. Worth saw it too. With one accord we dropped behind the log and looked over it at the animal which kept on up the pool, totally unaware of our presence.

"What is it?" whispered Worth excitedly, reaching for his gun.

"That otter; don't move for your life," I said. "You can't kill it with that shot-gun in the water, Worth. Wait a moment and see what it will do."

The otter, for such it undoubtedly was, although I had never seen one before and could recognize it only by the description in the books, swam steadily up the pool and round one side to the bank where the path was, and there it scrambled out of the water to the shore. It was an otter unmistakeably; a very dark animal with short, stubby head, squat ears, and long, thick tail pointed at the end. It moved awkwardly yet quickly on the land with its webbed feet and was lithe and sinuous in every movement. It was as large as a good-sized dog and weighed perhaps thirty or forty pounds.

We watched with breathless interest, hoping that he would run up the path to the trap, but

he did not do so immediately. He remained for some time on the bank moving his head and glancing rapidly about, looking very acute and intelligent. Worth held his gun ready, and would have shot him had he made an attempt to regain the water, but I doubt if his charge would have done much damage. A rifle bullet would have finished him in short order, and I regretted that we did not have one with us. Suddenly, quicker than I can write it, the otter turned and ran up the path. He smelt keenly of the earth ahead of him, and stopped at the pole to which the trap was attached. He seemed suspicious, and hesitated; then turned about as if to seek the water when,—click!—we saw and heard our large trap as it closed on his hind leg. The otter leaped into the air in a frenzy and made a dash for the brook, but the chain brought him up short with a strain that shook the stout pole. He twisted and turned his long, smooth body with lightning-like movements in a vain attempt to get loose; trap and chain clanked with a dismal sound. But all in vain. We watched the tragic struggle with varied feelings. I for one felt a pity for the poor creature, and I am sure Worth did too, but—we did not

hesitate; we were over the brook in a second racing through the water and up the path. The otter eyed us ferociously as we appeared, and made an attempt to avoid us by retreating backwards, but Worth, bringing the gun-butt down on his head, killed him instantly. With the animal stretched out before us and his troubles over, his smooth and glossy coat was a joy to our eyes. This, indeed, was a prize worth having. At the least calculation, I figured that his skin was worth fifteen dollars, or as much as three martin or mink pelts.

To take off and stretch the hide was somewhat of a problem for us. We finally concluded to take the animal back to camp and wait for Sass as he would probably know better how to do it than we did.

Worth took the body on his shoulders, and as there now seemed to be no use in leaving the trap any longer in the runway, I took it up and brought it to the dam. When we reached the camp we laid our prize on the porch and spent the rest of the day in idleness. This was one of our red-letter days.

Towards evening Sass made his appearance, coming along the lake shore. He followed a

small trail running on that side of the camp from Big to Little Averil, which we had not been over, nor did we know of its existence until we learned of it from the colored man. Sass caught sight of the otter and gave a crow of delight.

"Wall, fo' de lan's sakes, men, you got dat ahter after all, didn't you? Good work, dat, I calls it. How you git him anyhow?"

We told him how it occurred, and asked his advice about skinning the carcass.

"Dat berry easy; I done skinned an ahter two, three years ago on Jordan brook, 'bout ten miles from yere. You ain't ben dere yet, hab you?"

I answered no and inquired where Jordan brook was.

"Dat brook way up yonder," indicating with his hand some region lying back of the deadwater. "Say, mister, if you wanter—" he checked himself suddenly and busied himself over the carcass a moment, then resumed as follows. "Now, I show you how to skin this ahter. Got a good knife yere?"

Worth handed him a large clasp knife with a single blade some six inches in length. It was a keen-edged affair and Worth was exceedingly

proud of it. The colored man ran his thumb over it in a satisfied manner.

"Dat's a fine knife; dunno as I ebber seed a better one. Now, you lay de ahter on his back dis way, cut down inside his laigs—so—to de tail; cut round de tail and slit it a little ways. Now I works de skin off'n de laigs and tail berry careful"—after some efforts and a few grunts he succeeded in doing this. "When you gits de skin all loose round de hin'-quarters give it a strong pull, dis way and dat way, and de skin peels off jest like an orange: pull it off'n his fore-legs and rip it from his neck and head. Dere you are! Dat a jim-dandy skin, men. It sure am a beauty."

We admired the dexterous way the old man worked, and took the skin up in our hands to heft it. It was surprisingly heavy, being so thick and soft.

"You ain't got a stretcher-board big 'nough for dis pelt," said Sass; "ah'll make one. Mus' be fo' feet long. Dis ahter am a surprise to me, men. He warn't on dat outlet brook berry long, cause I trapped dat stream last winter an' spring, an' I didn't see no signs ob him. But I know whar he comed from, ah'll bet on it."

"Where was that, Sass?" inquired Worth.

"Dat animile mus' come ober ten miles to dis lake. Up in Canady dere's a stream whar dey been lumberin' an' it were a good place once for mink an' ahters. Dis one mus' hab come from dere; he swum down Big Averil till he come to de brook, and dere he made his home."

Sass found, after a search, a board some four feet long, six inches wide and an inch thick. He tried to split it with the axe but it splintered off two feet from the end. Throwing the broken-off piece aside in disgust, Sass trimmed the other one thin with the axe and treated another board in the same manner. Introducing these two pieces inside the skin he drove a wooden wedge between the two parts which separated them and stretched the skin tight as a drum-head on both sides. "So much for mister ahter," he exclaimed as he hung the skin in the mill with the others. "If you don't min', gem'-men, I will go wid you over youah line to-morrow mornin', an' help you set dem deadfalls in the woods."

"But how about your rheumatism, Sass?" asked Worth. "Of course we should like to

have you go along, but do you think you can stand it?"

"Mah rheumatism is much better, t'ank you, sah. I went into de brook yesterday, and got a hull bunch of shiners an' put 'em in de spring whar dey won't freeze de hull winter. I dunno what did it but mah laigs feel strong and well agin to-day."

"You must communicate with some medical journal, Worth," I broke in, "and send a few notes about this new cold-water remedy for rheumatism. Sass may be immortal yet for his discovery."

Sass's eyes rolled around in mute inquiry as he surveyed us in some perplexity, but he finally burst into a loud laugh.

"You gem'men making game of me agin, I see. Now I tell you what we ought to do tomorrow. 'Stid of goin' long de ridge first and den through de woods, settin' traps an' carryin' all de bait and skins an' de oder things de hull distance, de best t'ing is to go ober to Big Averil an' down to de foot ob de lake whar de woods begin. Dat'll be about five mile ob traps to set an' it will take mos' all day."

"How'll we get down the lake; walk it?" asked Worth.

"No, I hab a skiff dat'll carry all ob us, easy. I can meet you all down at the mouf ob the brook in de mornin', soon arter sun-up."

"Then we'll have to spend another night in the woods," I said, "and go over the trap line on the ridge the following day."

"Dat's it, sah. We can't do it all in one day, berry certain. We better sleep in de woods. You gem'men bring youah grub 'long, and yo blankets. I got grub an' ole blanket, too."

"Very well, that seems a good plan," I replied. "We will meet you at Big Averil to-morrow morning, and make an early start."

The colored man hung around the camp a little while longer and then took his departure, for it would soon be too dark to see his way through the woods. To wander in that wilderness after nightfall was no child's play, even for an experienced woodsman.

After breakfast, eaten before the sun had rolled up the curtain of mist which hung over Little Averil, we went down to the shore carrying both our guns, the axe, grub and blankets;

also all the muskrat carcasses and part of the otter's flesh cut up into small pieces for bait. The otter's entrails, which we thought would be a good drag, and all the meat we carried, tied on the end of a piece of rope. Loading everything into the batteau we pushed off in the mist. We lost sight of the shore almost immediately. The air was cold and the vapor clammy and irritating to our nostrils. The water was smooth, black, and oily looking as far as we could see on each side of the boat, which was only a few feet. We headed as near as we could judge straight for the dam and after twenty minutes of paddling the stubby bows of the batteau slid with a scraping noise on the sedgy shore, close to our destination. We went over the trail between the lakes, passing close to the scene of the otter's capture on the day before. It looked peaceful enough now. We got to the mouth of the outlet brook just as the sun appeared over the mountains, looking like a silver moon shining through the heavy curtain of fog.

Sass was waiting for us, stamping up and down to keep warm. An old boat was drawn up on shore. "Good mornin', good mornin'," he said cheerfully, "gwine to hab a fine day;

wedder breeder, dough; change coming pretty soon."

"Been here long, Sass?" inquired Worth as we answered his greetings and stowed our duffle in the boat.

" 'Bout a half hour. I declar' dis cold fog bad for ole bones. Soon as the sun gits up she'll lift and it'll git warmer."

"Where do you keep this boat?" I asked. "We've been along shore several times and didn't see anything of it. Got it hidden somewhere?"

"Hidden in de bresh," answered Sass with a grin. "Ain't no-one goin' ter find dat boat whar I put it. Can't tell who's a-comin' down de lake some mornin', an' I don't take no risk ob losin' it."

The mist was drawing slowly upwards showing a little of the shore-line, but it would settle down again in a few minutes obscuring everything. Sass, seemingly, did not need any direction or compass, for, seizing the oars, he motioned us to remain seated, one in the bow and the other in the stern, and pulled for the upper end of the lake. The skiff, heavily loaded, did not respond readily to his efforts, and took

in so much water that we began to cast apprehensive glances beneath us. We hoisted everything we could, including our feet, onto the thwarts. It took fully an hour to reach the scene of our operations, and the old man's black skin was streaked with sweat as he stopped rowing and we all jumped out to draw the boat up on shore. By this time the sun was shining brightly; only a low-lying wall of mist at the far end of the lake showed like a snow-bank in the clear air and was rapidly melting into the upper regions. Little rippling waves, glittering with cold and freshness, ran up on the dark, oozy bank, and a shaft of golden light extended as far as the eye could reach through the centre of the lake coming from the sun's rim, visible just above the distant mountains.

CHAPTER XIV

A TWELVE MILE LINE

Before us were the woods dark and grim save for the cheerful bunches of green hemlocks and spruce which grew here and there along the edge. Sass knew the way, and constituted himself captain. Everything was hoisted on our shoulders except the drag, and we set out. The colored man led with the axe and a bundle of splints for the "figure fours." Worth came next with the rifle, blankets, and our small packet of provisions, while I brought up the rear with the other gun, and the odorous drag trailing behind me on the rope covering and scenting our tracks. Sass maintained a cheerful conversation, or rather monologue. In fact, he kept up in a low tone a dissertation on life in the woods, observations on our surroundings, and general remarks on all kinds of subjects, as we tramped along. At first, we paid some attention to him, but his talk grew monotonous after a while, and

only a stray remark caught my ear. Now and then a sudden question from one of us would startle him from his reverie, and he would cast a quick, inquiring glance behind as he answered, then would resume his interrupted talk. After a while he turned with an apologetic smile and said quietly, "You all mus' excuse the ole man. I talks a lot I know, but I loves to do it. I hopes I don't weary you none, gem'men."

"Not at all," responded Worth kindly. "Where do we begin to set the traps, Sass?"

"Jes' here," he said, setting his splints down beside a tiny rivulet that threaded its way among some fallen logs and brush. A thicket was all around us, and what looked like a runway of some animal went entirely through one end of it. "From here on to de ridge, 'bout four mile an' a half, we will build a trap ebery fo'ty rods. You gem'men will please git me a heavy pole and fo' stakes. I'll hab de deadfall fix in a jiffy." He set to work whittling out his sticks while we got the pole and stakes. Sass made the trap, got his "figure four" into position, leading into the cuddy, and placed a piece of otter meat inside. A few drops of the fish oil were sprinkled on the lower log and on the bait. Sass

moved off a little ways to inspect the arrangement with a critical eye.

"Dat looks berry good," he exclaimed with a satisfied air. "Jes' hang a bit ob dem entrayls on de branch ober de trap, an' we will go on to de nex' one." I did as directed and we went on through the woods. It had taken about half an hour to set the first contrivance, and the same method was pursued in almost every instance. Occasionally Sass would make one of heavier materials—for bears, he said.

The sun shining high overhead warned us that it was noon and time for a rest. Partridges had whirred off along the way all the morning, but we had not attempted to shoot them for fear of frightening off some of the game we were after; but now as we prepared to enjoy our "nooning" I dropped one of them which rose nearby with an easy shot. Deer tracks were observed sunk deep in the ooze by every spring brook, and other tracks were in evidence with which we were not familiar. Some were as large as the palm of my hand, looking not unlike the impression made by a big, clumsy fist stuck in the mud, and these Sass pronounced to be bear tracks.

"Dey are in dese woods," he said, "an' we is

berry likely to catch one in a deadfall. Dat's why I build some of dem wid big logs, 'cause a bear is strong an' it takes a mighty large chunk o' wood to hurt him."

"A steel trap would be better for bears," I said, "with a clog attached so that he couldn't go far. A large bear wouldn't be hurt much in a deadfall."

"It would be better, but den we ain't got none here, so we has to do de bes' we can," answered Sass. "You gem'men eat youah lunch, please. We got afternoon ob hard work befo' us; you'll feel tired when we git to de end ob dat ridge whar yo' traps is."

"Where's your lunch?" interrogated Worth, as we sat down in a sunny spot and fell to discussing cold biscuits and meat, also cold tea in a bottle.

"Mah lunch? I don't want any lunch," answered the old man after a pause. "I didn't bring none but ah'll hab a smoke 'fore long."

We saw how it was. Sass hadn't any food with him simply because he felt he must be careful how he used up what little he had on hand in the cabin. It takes a lonesome life in the woods to teach a man how to economize in mat-

ters of that kind. We would not let the poor old fellow want while we were at the lakes, and forced him to sit down with us, and handed him some of our truck which he mumbled over and got down at last with much difficulty and thankfulness.

He then lit his pipe, and we sat in the warm sunshine for some time, enjoying the solitude of the surroundings. Sass claimed that this was the best part of the luncheon. I was inclined to agree with him. A couple of Canada jays sat on a branch near the glade and eyed our scraps of food doubtfully, scolding us to the top of their bent, finally flying off in disgust when they saw that we did not move away. Several chipmunks flirted up and down the tree-trunks nearby and kept up a continual expostulation with us. We were clearly intruders here and all the natives were on the watch, including, I have no doubt, many which we did not see, who speculated as to our purpose and wished that we would leave. We did go finally and resumed making our trap-line, Sass's axe trimming and blazing a way along to the ridge.

We set some forty traps before nightfall, all deadfalls, large and small, or pens in which

Sass hoped to trap something, but these last did not promise well in my estimation. A large steel trap with a heavy clog was the best thing for any large animal, and we had some of this kind on the ridge so we stood a chance to get one there. We shot three more partridges before leaving the woods and emerging at the lower end of the ridge, near our old camping place. There we saw the pretty little valley, and the stream coursing rapidly along where we had found the drowned mink. The setting sun, red and large, was just dropping behind the bare trees fringing the top as we started to climb the ridge. Sass was a good woodsman to thus lead us through five miles of thick forest and come out within a stone's throw of his objective. I am inclined to think he did it more by the lay of the land than by anything else. It was a hollow plain for many miles around, rising gradually as it approached the narrow valley until it formed a steep height extending a long distance. This keeping the sun bearing properly on our course —almost in our faces during the afternoon— helped much, as our course was nearly west.

We made a good fire and built a shack to protect us from the night air which was rapidly

growing raw and cold. I got some water from the brook to boil tea. We were soon comfortable. Our partridges were plucked and spitted before the roaring fire; they sizzled at a great rate, and their plump breasts looked most appetizing. Salt and pepper were on hand this time and the meaty morsels proved to be delicious eating. We were pretty tired. Sass who had done most of the chopping and the hard work through the day seemed very stiff and sore. Despite our repeated efforts to separate him from the axe which he clung to obstinately all day, he insisted on building all the traps. He was a good worker and a willing one and we had got to like the old man immensely. Now he sat by the fire opposite us as it grew dark, and endeavored to masticate his food with his toothless gums. This was a hard job for him, and he was very sensitive about our looking at him too, for he turned his body partly away from us as if to prevent our noticing his efforts. We looked everywhere but at him until he got through and this seemed to gratify the old fellow.

A solemn stillness was on the woods. There was no moon, and banks of clouds had massed up in the eastern sky during the late afternoon.

"We gwine to hab a change," observed Sass, "an' I belieb a sto'm is a-comin' on. Dis fire feels good to me." He drew his frayed old coat a little closer round his spare form. "I hopes to goodness, men, we get some fur animiles tomorrer. You hab a good many traps on dis ridge an' dey shore must hab somet'ing in 'em by dis time."

I then told him about the scratchy screech that I had heard along the ridge three nights before, and he shook his head.

"Dat a bob-cat; don' know if he was in a trap. Dey scritches fearful sometimes jes' for de fun of it, seems to me. Mebbe we hear 'im agin tonight."

"Did you bring a blanket, Sass?" I inquired, for I had not seen anything resembling that article in the old man's outfit. In answer to this he opened his coat and showed us a tattered garment which looked not unlike an old bath towel pinned round his body.

"I ain't got airy blankets, so I puts on dis extra wrapper," he said apologetically, "and it'll keep me warm 'nough, I reckon." We did not think so, in view of the fact that our own thick blankets had not kept us any too warm while on

our first long tramp to the boarding house, and our cold night camp on this very ridge was fresh in our memories. We resolved to give him a berth close to the fire that night and if necessary share one of our blankets with him. The fire was replenished at sleeping time so that it burned fiercely; good dry logs were laid by, and we turned in. The ridge and valley seemed to be alive late that night. Yells and screams came up out of the obscurity below in the direction of the camp, and off in the woods towards Big Averil there was an answering chorus out of the blackness there. Our bright fire seemed to enrage the denizens of the wilds and they voiced their indignation in no uncertain manner from near and far. We slept poorly. Sass however slumbered quietly, his old head pillowed on a log and his "wrapper" and coat snugged up round him. Twice during the night I got up and laid some wood on the embers so that the heat would protect him somewhat, but he did not stir until morning. This came on cold and gray when the dying fire no longer gave out its comforting warmth and cheer.

We bustled about to limber our stiff muscles, and then dashed down to the brook to bathe our

faces in its cold waters; also to take a little of it internally, which I have always found a good general practice.

Breakfast was eaten in a hurry. We were anxious to see our traps. From the hubbub during the night it was evident that game such as we were after was plentiful hereabouts. The only question was whether the animals had been obliging enough to get caught. There had been time enough for them to find the traps in the long interval since they had been set, but the "critters" were wary and not easily imposed upon. Anything more cautious or sagacious than a fisher for instance does not roam the woods; he will often smash the little house built by the trappers and secure the bait without disturbing the weight in the least; doing this undoubtedly because he thinks the trap is there and that it may hurt him if he meddles with it. Our first trap was on the ridge—a deadfall—and this we found empty. Perhaps proximity to the camp had scared off any prowler which might have sprung it, for the scent of man was strong around the place. Sass led as usual with the axe. Although he had not been over our line before he needed no guide as the notches on the

trees were plainly in sight from one trap to another. The old man was keen on the hunt and stepped along briskly with his eyes roving all about for signs.

In the next trap we found a marten hung up on a spring-pole and still alive. He had been caught very recently for he was kicking about rattling the chain against the pole and trying to bite it in two. He was a pretty, chubby looking animal, with a short, thick coat and somewhat resembled a fox. A blow on the head despatched him at once and I took him along. Another trap, a deadfall, was empty. Sass did not like the way we had built these, and said so. "Signs of man's handiwork about them," he said, although we had tried to cover up all traces of our presence as much as possible.

We found another marten a short distance further on in a small steel Newhouse trap. Around our next deadfall were tracks—bob-cat's, Sass said—but the bait inside was not taken. Judging from the way the animal had circled around the vicinity however he must have been sorely tempted to investigate matters more closely. It was lucky for him that he did not.

We then descended to the stream, and in-

spected our traps along the banks. We found four mink there, two of them dead. They had drowned themselves on the sliding poles. One of the others was almost free; he had nearly bitten off his left leg in his efforts to free himself, but was too late in doing it by only a few minutes.

Our luck so far was good but not beyond expectations in this neighborhood. As we could not carry the carcasses any further we skinned them by the stream and the pelts formed a nice pile as they were folded up, flesh sides together, and rolled in one bundle.

We rested here a spell, after which we once more ascended the ridge. A long walk disclosed nothing more in the traps until we came to the hollow tree where there had been signs of some large creature on our first visit. A big steel trap had been placed inside the cavity and we saw at once that there had been a disturbance there of some sort. For one thing, the stout stake driven alongside the trunk was no longer standing straight and firm but was inclined perceptibly towards the entrance, and the chain was stretched tightly between the roots and led into the dark hole out of sight.

CHAPTER XV

SASS AND THE FISHER

When we got near the place our ears were saluted with a vicious snarl from inside the tree, and a fierce scratching and thumping was heard. We ran forward, old Sass holding the axe ready to strike at anything which appeared, but nothing came forth. A watchful silence seemed to prevail inside. We halted at a safe distance, keeping the mouth of the hole in view, and held a council of war.

"What do you suppose is in there?" queried Worth of the negro. "Pretty rum customer he must be judging by the noise he makes."

"Dat a bob-cat or else a fisher, for sure," answered Sass, his eyes rolling round towards the hole in an alarming fashion. "Eder one of dem animiles is a bad lot and don't you go near it. He'll snap you quicker'n wink if he gits a chance. Bob-cat worse'n de oder one if he's cornered, and I believe it is one of dem critters."

"Bob-cat—lucivee—lynx, all one and the same thing," remarked Worth reflectively; "fur worth eight dollars. He'll be a prize if we can get him out. But now that he *is* caught what are we going to do with him. He seems inclined to stay where he is."

"Got to get him out some way," I answered. "Perhaps we can shoot him from the entrance without going too near."

We looked attentively at the approach to the den but saw that it would be almost impossible to get a straight shot inside. A mass of earth and roots blocked up the entrance except in one place and that led in at an angle where a charge of shot would probably expend itself harmlessly against the trunk. The animal was doubtless snugged up far back and as much removed from the opening as it could get. Shooting it therefore did not seem feasible.

"I belieb ah'll see if I can get a look in dar an' find out jes' whar dat lynk is," observed Sass, as he grabbed his axe close up to the head, and prepared to advance on the enemy.

"Look out for yourself," called out Worth; "he may jump out on you any moment if you are not careful."

The old man gave a yell

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THE
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TILDEN

"Nebber fear, ah'll fix him if he plays dat air trick, you'll see, men." So saying, the colored man began a cautious edging towards the hole. No sound came from inside until Sass's black face was within three or four feet of the opening. Just as he was endeavoring to peer into the obscurity, with a spring and a rattle out jumped an animal about the size of an otter, and in color seemingly black as a crow, which made for Sass viciously, snarling and snapping its sharp teeth close to his legs.

The old man gave a yell—a real rebel yell as Worth said afterwards—and tumbled backwards on the ground. He swung his axe energetically upwards, but the effort endangered his own legs more than the savage animal before him, for the black man had his feet elevated at an acute angle as a better protection against the expected attack, and the sharp blade missed his extremities only by a hair's breadth.

"Good lawd," roared Sass, "dat a fisher; shoot 'im, men, quick, afore he gits me." But the animal could not reach his prostrate form owing to the shortness of the chain, and quickly retreated into the tree clanking the steel trap at

every step, and uttering curious whimpering cries of rage and fear. Sass rolled over several times and then got on his feet looking fearfully back at the scene of his discomfiture. "Dat a buster; dat animile. I tell you he'd a scrunched dem teeth in me if he'd got a chanst," he exclaimed as he brushed the leaves and dirt off his clothing. "What you tink of him; ain't he a fine feller?"

"The pekan," remarked Worth, stepping towards the tree and assuming the air of a professional lecturer; "also known as the fisher, the black cat, black marten fox, black marten cat, and Pennant's marten—for by all of these names is he known among trappers—is a large weasel; very wary, active, full of nervous energy, bloodthirsty and savage. He is a robber and a murderer; leaves a trail marked with blood all through the woods"—a snarl from the hole interrupted his speech and he stepped back a pace, cocking his gun and keeping a wary eye on the entrance. "Small game and birds, and even larger animals such as deer fall a victim to his insatiate thirst for gore. Now the lynx, bad as he is—"

"Say, Worth, what is this, a lecture on zoölogi-

cal subjects?" I interrupted. "The question is how are we going to get this fellow out?"

"I've heard it said," continued my friend imperturbably, "that one peculiarity of this weasel is that when he comes to the trail of any other animal on his rounds he follows it to the death, usually of the other creature; but when he strikes a man's trail he will follow it, perhaps, if he thinks there is a meal of any kind ahead, but he is never known to cross it."

"Very good," I said. "You seem to know this party right well. In addition to this did you acquire any information as to the best manner of yanking him out of a hole and securing his pelt?"

"That gives me an idea. Pardon me, Mr. Sassenger, please to get two or three pointed stakes about three or four feet long, will you, and kindly give me the axe after you've cut them, please."

"Suttinly, sah, pleased, ah'm sure," answered the old man with alacrity, and went off at once looking for some suitable saplings which he found and proceeded to cut down and trim smooth.

"There's a good deal of politeness wasted here

over this matter," I disgustedly observed, but Worth merely made a general remark about somebody "putting up or shutting up," which I failed to take notice of. We waited a few minutes for the old man to return. I attributed Worth's flow of spirits to the excellent success we had had so far in making our fur pile grow, and this day's work would go far to increase it to generous proportions. Weasel or no weasel, I knew my partner did not care to kill the animal merely for the sake of killing, for he had been heard to say he would rather see destructive animals of any kind roaming the trails or peering out of a bush than not to see them at all. It made the woods seem natural to him, he explained. Foxes hovering around a barnyard full of chickens would have been safe with him; and if a deer had broken into his bean patch and made his dinner there daily, he simply would have planted more beans and not shot the animal as some curmudgeonly old farmer in our old home town had been known to do.

"Did you see Sass get out of the way of that old fisher?" asked Worth humorously. "I don't know but that a cat in a hole and a rheumatic old person in front of it would develop as good

a remedy for stiff joints as any druggist dope ever did."

I smiled at this; and on Sass's coming back with three long poles Worth proceeded with his plan for cornering the vicious creature. The fisher had become quiet. Not a sound came from the cavity as Worth, making a circuit, approached the trunk back of the opening and noiselessly got on top of it a few feet back from the upturned roots at the end. He carried the axe and poles. Walking lightly on top he got near the entrance. A muffled snarl from below announced that the animal heard him and was growing uneasy at the doubtful proceedings. Poising a pole right over the hole, square and upward, Worth lowered it to the earth and with a few quick strokes hammered its point firmly into the dirt, partly closing the entrance. A clanking sound came from inside and a slight rustling followed but the fisher did not emerge from his concealment. Another pole and then the third was driven down and the animal was secured within. Only a few inches of open space remained between the stakes and it did not seem possible that the fisher could squeeze out between them.

"Now, then," announced Worth, jumping down and gazing into the dark hole. "I think we've got him. I don't see him at all, but I tell you what we'll do. Sass, you take the axe head, hook it into the chain, and when I give the word pull as hard as you can. We'll stand off here with the guns, and if he comes into view we'll plug him at once." He walked off about ten feet from the tree with the rifle and I followed with the shotgun.

"Let me fire first," said Worth to me, "the bullet will do less harm to his fur than that charge of shot of yours." When we were ready he called out to Sass and the colored man, compressing his lips with grim determination, pulled on the chain with all his strength. A fierce yell came from the hole but nothing budged, and Sass after a few seconds' hauling, relaxed his grip and spat on his hands for fresh efforts.

"Dat fisher strong as a 'toro,'" he grumbled. "He bracin' hisself agin the bottom and sides with his fo' laigs stiff as pokers." He tried again. The chain drew taut and the sweat started on Sass's forehead, showing that the strain must be great. In fact the fisher couldn't stand it any longer, for with a series of snarls

and a crashing leap he struck against the stout poles, breaking through them as if they were made of matchwood, and stood quivering outside. He at once made a menacing dive at Sass who gave another remarkable exhibition of back somersaulting and rolled away on one side to safety. The fisher, his eyes gleaming with fury, now turned them on us and jerked vainly on the chain in an endeavor to reach us. Worth who had him covered with his rifle waited for a few seconds until the creature's head was still, then took aim, and fired. The ball struck the animal squarely in the jaw, passed up through his mouth and shattered the back part of his skull. He dropped in his tracks, his body twitching slightly. In a moment or two he was still, his vicious life ended.

Sass held him up by a hind leg to let the blood drip away from his fur, and gave the body a spiteful kick as he did so.

"I don't hab no compunctiousness 'bout killin' dese yere brutes," he said. "Dey are de pests of de woods—murderous willins, all ob dem."

"Nice fur, though," I said, admiring the beautiful black coat. The animal was slightly darker underneath than elsewhere, but towards

the head there was an odd mixture of gray hairs with the black, setting off the fur finely. The body must have weighed twenty-five pounds.

We took the skin off at once and reset the baited trap. This seemed to be a good place. It was evidently an old den, and it might be another of the animals was not far off; or a lynx, perhaps, might take up his quarters there, finding the hole unoccupied.

"How far to the camp, now?" we inquired of Sass.

" 'Bout three, fo' mile I reckon," he responded, after taking a survey of the surroundings. "It is nearly noon, gem'men, and I tink we can get back afore dark, ef we don't hab no more tussels like dis one."

"A bite to eat wouldn't go badly," observed Worth. "I'm as hungry as a bear; what say?" And seated on the tree we finished all the food we had, which consisted of scraps of biscuit and cold meat.

The fisher's body was thrown into the cavity behind the trap as we did not know what else to do with it. It might prove attractive to some prowler.

Along the remainder of the line we found for

the most part a succession of empty traps, but succeeded in getting another marten and a mink, which evidently had struck the scented trail and followed it to their undoing. When we reached the deadwater it was late in the afternoon. The days were growing short very fast and night was coming on with rain and a rising wind. We saw two or three muskrats hopping about in the traps at the swamp and took them along with us to camp. Sass wished to stay and help stretch the skins properly before striking out for his hut, but as he absolutely refused to stay with us for the night we insisted on his going before it got too dark; so he departed. We removed all of our skins which were dry to the loft over our living room, and before night had hung all the new pelts, nicely stretched, in the mill. They made an imposing array. Our profits for the day would amount to a considerable sum. If we had two or three more such successes during our stay, we felt that our enterprise would prove decidedly remunerative.

Rain was now falling fast, driven before a cold east wind. It whistled around the corners of the boarding house as we sat beside the crackling fire. The cold outdoors was penetrating

—a big change had come. We hoped that Sass had arrived safely at his hut on Big Averil and was comfortable there. He had food we knew, but his shack was far from being a desirable place to spend a stormy night in, even with a good warm blanket to crawl under, and this he did not have, as we knew. We felt that we must make him forsake his cabin later on and come to live with us. We had plenty of bunks to spare and a fire big enough to warm a company was burning in the stove.

"How the woods roar!" exclaimed Worth as a blast tore over the camp causing loose boards to creak and groan everywhere on the structure. The noise of the rain on the roof was audible even on the lower floor. "My lands, it's coming down like all possessed," he continued as he opened the door to peer into the darkness. The wind tore the door from his grasp, slammed it back against the partition, and a sheet of rain struck him in the face and body as he hastily closed it again and braced it with a chunk of wood.

"Br'r-r-rrr!! Cold as Greenland already. We're going to get a touch of winter to-night. The old colored man was right about a change

coming; this is another variety of weather with a vengeance."

He came back and sat down by the fire.

The woods were complaining mightily. Thousands of heavy branches whipped and twisted themselves together, and many broke to fall on the wet earth. Drooping gray old patriarchs of the forest groaned in chorus as the fierce wind strove to cast them headlong, and some of them measured their length on the ground before morning. The noise was such as I imagined a heavy surf would make breaking on a rock-bound coast. Sleep was almost impossible. We spent most of the night lying awake, wrapped closely in our blankets to keep warm. Once, on Worth's getting up to tend to the fire, he looked out of the window and announced that it was snowing. Big flakes were plastered on the glass, and whirled by on the wind which still maintained its steady fifing-music—a nerve racking sound.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WHITE WOODS

Winter had set its sign on all of this region by morning and an unbroken sheet of purest white stretched over woods, valley and mountains. The White Woods! Bowers of airy grace and purity canopied every little dell and glade; and overhead, magnificent arches stretched to the tree tops. The dull brown dross of earth was changed as if by a magician's wand into a soft, thick carpet such as no queen could cause to be spread for her footsteps, although this one, perhaps, she would have found a trifle damp to her feet. The lake looked like a deep, fathomless bowl of black ink set within rims of alabaster and the unsightly piles of sawdust, logs and débris of every description on its shores, were buried under six inches of snow. The wind had moderated but the snow was still falling fast. The leaden sky gave no promise of an early cessation of the storm. The little

thermometer hanging outside the door registered twenty-two degrees above.

"Our traps will be useless under this blanket," grumbled Worth; "no animal can find them, or if he did probably would not get caught through the heavy snow."

"The scent of the drag is undoubtedly lost, too," I answered, "but I think if anything stepped into a trap even with this snow over it there would be a good chance of its being caught. The covering's soft, the only thing to fear is that ice may form and freeze up the traps."

"As long as it snows it won't freeze," said Worth, "but I think it is getting colder all the time. What for breakfast this morning? Our meat supply is reduced to a few scraps and some bones. There's a frozen trout on a board in the mill and that is about all the game the larder will afford."

"Good tracking this weather, Worth. Every animal in the woods will leave a trail a blind man could follow if he had the use of his fingers. We can follow a deer pretty easy if we find his trail."

"Yes, but we ought to have snowshoes," re-

sponded Worth. "Deer lead one a long chase sometimes."

Our breakfast consisted of the trout and tea, with some hot mush, and we set a pan of biscuit to bake for dinner. We wondered how the colored man was faring. Our food supply must be replenished, so shouldering our guns we set out back of the camp to look for signs. We saw no tracks in the snow nearby and the driving flakes made the going so unpleasant that we were glad to return after a journey of less than a mile. No game was about that morning, all the forest animals preferring no doubt sleeping in some snug retreat to facing such inclement weather. After we had warmed ourselves sufficiently by the fire, we sallied out again and trolled over a portion of the black lake, hoping to get a trout or two, but in this we were also unsuccessful, and we returned to camp. The day passed slowly, one of storm throughout, and it was not until nightfall that the snow ceased.

A bright sun greeted us the following morning, shining over the wintry waste with a dazzling brightness. From the deep blue sky came a keen breath out of the far north—a glorious

winter morning. Thermometer registered six degrees above.

A fringe of ice lay around the lake. Every quiet cove was covered with a thin, glasslike layer which was easily crashed through with a stone, but the main body of water was rippling and dancing under the sun's rays. Gloves and ear mufflers were donned and we struck into the woods once more for game. Our trap line must wait a day or two until the snow melted so as to uncover it, or at least until we were prepared to flounder through the drifts for many weary miles. We found tracks abroad in the forest paths. Jerky little jumps of the gray squirrels were visible at the base of numerous big trees, and these led off usually to little holes dug in the snow where some hoard of acorns or nuts was known to be. We shot three fat fellows in a short time and hung them on a branch beside the timber road, ready to take back with us on our return. Other little tracks like the imprint of small hands Worth thought were those of racoons or martens. Among other signs we observed the trail of a fox who had evidently passed through the wood very early that morning, or perhaps in the night—single tracks all

in a straight line leading direct to some definite goal which the wary fellow had in mind. His is the track of a one-legged creature, for he plants his four feet in front of one another like the Indian bands which used to thread these very wilds, treading in one another's footsteps.

A mile from camp we struck a buck's trail crossing the road. It was fresh and sharp. He had broken through the thin, icy crust on the snow, penetrating to a depth of six inches. As the freezing cold had come late in the preceding night it was evident that the tracks were made that morning, possibly within an hour of the time we saw them. On account of the deep snow in which traveling was difficult two things were almost certainly to be deduced from his tracks. One that he lived close by; also that he would not go far on his trail. We set out to follow. The trail led us for half a mile through a part of the woods we had not seen before, over easy level ground and down into a hollow, which, as we proceeded cautiously along keeping a wary outlook, widened into a valley covered with a dense growth of hardwood trees. The opposite side of the valley we could not see, but on proceeding across it in a short time

we came to an ice-bordered brook. The rapid course of this stream and its general appearance were familiar to us. It was the same which ran along by the ridge several miles below where our mink traps were set. We thought it might be the Jordan brook which Sass had hinted something about some time before in camp. The deer's trail led to the bank of the stream where the animal had stopped for a moment to drink, as the confused traces showed, and a big jump had landed him on the other side. The snow there was ploughed up in two long furrows. We followed along slowly, stopping behind each thicket or large tree to peer cautiously ahead. We knew we might come on the deer at any moment. Try as we might we could not avoid making an annoying amount of noise crunching through the snow crust. Snowshoes would have enabled us to overtake the animal quickly and without a sound. We regretted not having them.

For an hour we trudged on the trail. We had long since gained the ridge which ran parallel to the valley and now were following it nearly at its summit in a direction away from our camp. We must have gone three miles in this

manner. Either the deer was very fresh and active or he was making for some swamp or sheltering side hill to feed. The tracks then swerved over the top of the ridge and disappeared on the other side. When we came to the summit we halted behind a pile of rocks and took a survey of the further side. The ridge fell away in a series of rocky ledges covered with a dense underbrush and small trees to a snow-covered, hummocking swamp below, and this we searched with anxious eyes for the deer. We were overjoyed to see him about a quarter of a mile away feeding quietly on some tender brake which still showed above the snow. He stood not far from the base of the ridge—a fine large buck with branching antlers. With these he occasionally thrashed the bushes in front of him for some purpose, perhaps to knock the snow off. He was far out of shot and how to get near without alarming him was a problem. We finally adopted the following plan: Worth was to remain where he was with the shotgun while I went along the near side of the ridge with the rifle to where I judged I should be opposite the deer, when I was to mount the ridge

The deer was in sight

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and endeavor to get a shot. If the animal would only stay where he was for another ten minutes I could easily get him, providing I did not miss an easy shot by a sudden attack of "buck-fever."

I descended the hill and set out on a loping trot along its side until I arrived opposite to where I thought the animal was. Cocking the rifle I stole as softly as the snow would allow, to the summit and peered cautiously over. The deer was in sight, some seventy-five yards away in practically the same place as I had last seen him, daintily cropping the slender twig tops and bucking the bushes with his horns. Resting my gun on a rock I took careful aim at a spot back of his shoulder, and fired. The buck dropped in his tracks for a moment, partly resting on his extended forelegs, but immediately got up and started off slowly, and then with a series of bounds, through the thickets. Some blood showed on the snow. I ran down the hill and heard a faint shout from Worth. I saw him waving his cap as he scrambled down the declivity to join me. When he had come up we inspected the blood signs on the snow. There

were only a few large ruby-colored drops visible scattered about where the deer fell, and along his trail.

"He doesn't bleed much," I said rather doubtfully, "but he must have been quite badly hurt, judging by the way he dropped."

"Little blood—good sign," answered Worth cheerfully; "he is hurt most inside and all his bleeding is internal. Bet you we find him within a quarter of a mile. What say?"

We started rapidly along the trail. The deer's leaps soon faltered and gave way to a sort of running gait, and then a walk. Sure enough, within the distance set by Worth, we came on the buck lying motionless on his side among the thickets with a blood-rimmed hole in his side. A noble fellow, weighing as much as the first deer we shot, and a fine specimen of *C. Virginianus.*

"We'll have to tote him four miles to camp," observed Worth hefting the deer mentally, and then elevating his shoulder like a Frenchman. "Feel fit for it this morning?"

"Fit or not fit, back to camp he goes," I answered. "But first let's have a spell, partner, to celebrate this joyful event."

We sat down on a rock in the bright sunlight and spent a quarter of an hour drinking in the wild and solitary scene around us. In front rose the hill down which I had plunged after the deer. Ledges jutted out here and there mostly covered with earth and thick growing shrubs; thickets of tangled briars filled in every available space. The ridge was perhaps a hundred feet high, and as my eye roved along its sides I perceived what I thought was a hole between two large rocks, half concealed by the bushes. It showed black against the surrounding snow, and this was what first attracted my attention. It was perhaps two or three feet in diameter.

"I believe there is a den or cave of some kind up there," I exclaimed, calling Worth's attention to it, "and I've a good mind to go up and see if there is anything in it."

"I'm with you; come along," replied Worth, looking up at it with interest. We climbed with difficulty to the cavity, and looked about us. No tracks were visible leading in or out although it seemed a likely place for some animal to make a home of. It was amply large enough for a man to enter in a stooping position. The pas-

sage seemed to turn inwards towards the bowels of the hill, but how long it was or where it led we could not conjecture. After some hesitation, Worth announced that he would explore it for a short distance. It might turn out to be a roomy cave among the ledges, useful to us perhaps at some time; so with his gun ready and taking along a few matches he dropped on his knees and cautiously crawled in.

At a little turn in the opening which I could see, he paused and struck a match, and gazed with some nervousness along the new passage. I heard his muffled voice say that nothing was to be seen except what appeared to be a ray of light some distance ahead, and that he would go a little further. He then disappeared, while I waited with some anxiety outside. Perhaps a savage lucivee or even a "painter" was there, ready to claw the eyes out of any bold intruder; or even a black bear might block the way very effectually. Anything was possible. Suddenly I heard Worth's voice from somewhere within the hill, strangely altered by his subterranean quarters, yelling out something to me. I could distinguish my name, and at last managed to make out an impatient summons for me to en-

ter, followed by wondering exclamations such as "great," "never saw anything like it," etc. His voice did not betoken fear or alarm but rather was pitched in an excited and admiring key, as if he were witnessing some strange and attractive scene. I hastily stooped and entered the passage, reached the turn and crawled along a dark tunnel for fully ten feet to where I saw a faint light like daylight shining ahead of me. The light came from another passage running at right angles to the one I was on, and when I got to the end of this I saw a strange sight.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CAVE OF IVORY

The passage opened on a high vaulted chamber inside the hill, fully a dozen feet wide and as many high. The sides and top were of a beautiful light gray color, looking as if they were composed of some smooth and polished stone. The floor was of earth, hard and compact. Above, through an aperture in the roof, rays of light from the ouside world were streaming in making the interior almost as light as day. No débris of any kind was visible. The place looked as if it might be furnished immediately with some elegant household effects and become a charming room in some grand mansion.

"What in the world is this?" I exclaimed in astonishment. "What do you make of it, Worth?"

"Nothing extraordinary," he answered composedly, "once you get the hang of it. Can you imagine what this hill is composed of?"

"No," I replied.

"Marble, my boy, that is all. This is a big quarry of some of the finest stone to be found in Vermont. Of that I am almost certain."

"Are you sure it is marble? Perhaps it is only some common white stone, pretty looking, but of no practical use," I suggested, unconvinced.

"It is marble, I tell you, or rather limestone, which is about the same thing. I have read up on the geological formation of the state and learned among other things, something about marble. Now Vermont, as you know, heads the list for the production of fine marble in the United States. There is a quarry at Rutland well known for its white statuary marble. It is almost equal to that produced at Carrara in Italy and is used largely for the very finest work. Just come over here for a moment and look at this wall."

I walked over to where he was standing at the further side of the chamber and examined the smooth wall, which extended in two or three sections of various widths to the roof. The stone was hard and close grained in texture, and very light in tint, rather of a dove color,

I thought, and was sprinkled all over with little white crystalline dots which set off its beauty considerably. The surface was perfectly smooth and polished, a long period of time probably having elapsed since the walls were split apart by some upheaval in the hill and the stone subjected to the action of trickling water and to other natural agencies tending to gradually wear it away.

"If I am not in error," continued Worth, rubbing his hand over the surface of the stone, "this is birdseye limestone, so-called, or something akin to it, and is valuable for building and decorative purposes. I have no doubt the whole hill at this point is underlaid with it. There is a fortune here for someone. The only trouble is that it is a long way from a market and perhaps would not pay anyone to work it at present."

"Where does the light come from there?" I asked, calling attention to the vaulted roof. "There must be a hole up there opening on the top of the hill. We will find out just where we are from the outside, and try and trace the extent of the marble. There are undoubtedly outcroppings visible along the hill, but the snow

will interfere with the work somewhat. Wait here, Worth," I added, "and I will go outside to see if I can find the opening. I will shove a pole down if I locate it."

I made my way to daylight once more and on emerging from the hole took a survey above me. Just over the entrance to the cave, some twenty feet or so, almost at the top of the hill was a mass of earth and rock, the latter dirty looking and stained with foreign matter. I clambered up, and taking out my jack-knife scraped away the thick covering of lichens and moss sufficiently to show that they were without doubt of the same formation as the walls of the chamber; and on looking along the hill I could distinguish other ledges which I was convinced were composed of the same material. I searched carefully about for the opening but it was some time before I found it between two outcroppings of marble. It was a narrow aperture running diagonally downwards. Securing a long pole, I stuck it in as far as I could. When nearly its whole length had disappeared, I heard a shout from Worth below.

"Here's the hole! How far down is it from the surface?" he yelled.

"About eight feet, I reckon. Do you see it plainly?"

"A couple of feet or so are sticking through. Do you see any more signs along the hill?"

"Plenty of them," I answered. "Better come out and we will look around thoroughly. We can't discover much for the snow, though."

Worth came out in a few minutes and we went over the whole top of the ridge for a considerable distance, kicking the snow off the exposed rocks, and estimating the distance between them. Our conclusion was that there was the making of a big quarry here unless all signs failed, and providing Worth was not mistaken in his judgment of the deposit's value.

"Now the next thing is to keep this thing dark for a while," said Worth impressively. "We may be wrong about the whole matter, although I am firmly convinced to the contrary. Nevertheless, we will get expert advice on the subject when we leave here in the spring if it takes all our fur money to do it. There may be a fortune here for us, or at any rate a good large sum of money."

"My sentiments exactly," I exclaimed. "I wonder who owns all this land around here?"

"Some lumber company, I suppose. Maybe Mr. Butterfield who owns the camp can tell us. Perhaps he owns it himself," suggested Worth.

"We will work this out somehow during the winter. We've got plenty of time to lay out a plan. Time to start now for camp, Worth. There's that big buck to tote home. How are we going to do it, anyway?"

"Well, it'll be a job in this snow. I think the best way is to get a stout pole, tie the deer's legs to it and carry him between us. Slow going, but I don't know of any better plan."

I signified my acceptance of this method, and after some trouble we got the deer suspended between us on a sapling with his legs lashed to it and his head hanging down. My comrade leading, we started slowly on our back trail towards Little Averil, and plodded along for a mile, crossing the ridge and then down into the valley. Here we discovered new tracks, freshly made, following our old footsteps and the deer's—deep "pugs" they were in the snow occasionally covering up the trail, as if someone had plunged his clenched fists into the snow at intervals of several feet. Some large animal had bounded along the trail in pursuit of us. We saw signs

where the creature had left the trail abruptly on hearing us coming, and further on the place where it had come out of the woods striking the fresh trail. I looked inquiringly at Worth as we trudged along, both of us careful to keep a sharp lookout on all sides.

"Bob-cat," said Worth, answering my unspoken question briefly; "smelt a meal ahead. Hope we get a shot at him." But we did not get even a view of him.

After a weary march we regained the camp without mishap. The deer was hung to a beam inside the mill. He was frozen stiff, and on that account we deferred skinning him until a good fire had been started in the camp and we could get him thawed. The weather was very cold. On the lake a thin sheet of ice had formed which was growing thicker every hour. Should the freezing temperature continue for forty-eight hours longer we would be enabled to do our traveling over the hard ice and not have to depend on our old batteau. The boat could be put into winter quarters. We would not be sorry for this, as she was a rickety craft and likely to let us into the lake unexpectedly any day.

We had our deer skinned and the heavy hide stretched on a hickory hoop in the loft before breakfast next morning. Our meat supply was assured for some time to come and this was a relief to us; but we began to feel the need of some fruit or similar aid in disposing of our almost unvaried diet of game and fish, and thought to look round for some wild berries in the swamp or on the mountains. These we could boil down with sugar into a kind of jelly and it would be a welcome addition to our daily fare, almost necessary in fact to our health.

During the forenoon we broke a way over the short trail to Sass's cabin, taking some of the deer meat with us. The old man was indoors skinning a rabbit which he had snared during the night. A small and insufficient fire was burning in the old stove and the temperature of the shack was decidedly chilly; but as Sass's indoor costume comprised his "wrapper," a pair of dilapidated arctics, and a cap with ear-muffs of lynx fur attached, this did not seem to bother him much, for he welcomed us with the unfailing good nature of the colored race.

We detailed our experience of the day before getting the deer, but omitted all reference to the

cave, for we thought Sass might in his thoughtless way let out some information to others before the proper time had arrived. We dwelt particularly on the difficult going we had experienced in the deep snow.

At this Sass gave a loud snort of amusement. "Why, men, what you need is snowshoes. I hab dem here. If I'd known you was a-goin' on dat trip I'd a brung dem over yisterday. Ebber trabel on dem articles?"

We told him we had not. He hauled out from behind some duffle in a corner a pair of oval wooden frames with pointed ends. They were about three feet long and a foot broad, webbed with deerskin thongs—awkward looking footgear, but Sass assured us that with them we could go over drifts ten feet high if necessary, of either hard or soft snow. While hard snow would cause them to slip some there was a proper way to manage them which he proceeded to show us outdoors. We watched with interest. He used a sort of shuffling gait over the snow which took him along at a surprising rate and there was hardly an indentation in the hard crust to mark his trail. It looked easy, but on Worth's donning the shoes

and endeavoring to imitate the old man's movements, he came to grief at once, his nose buried in a drift. Sass was mightily amused and told Worth to slide his feet along and not attempt to lift them up as in walking. It did not take my partner long, however, to get the hang of the thing, and soon he was gliding along almost as speedily as Sass himself had done.

Sass told us he had another pair he had made during his ample leisure, and offered both pairs to us with the assurance that he would not need them. They would be indispensable to us in walking our trap line, he said. Speaking of this, he advised us to wait a day or two before setting out on such a journey until milder weather had melted the snow, as our traps were buried out of sight and frozen in besides; and this would cause us a great deal of trouble in getting them out.

We would need some fish for bait in our despoiled traps along the line and we visited the spring hole to get some dace. They were in poor condition. They had begun eating one another owing to lack of food and confinement, and had diminished greatly in numbers, so Sass said.

To prevent a loss from further cannibalism of this kind we asked Sass to provide them with a few scraps of meat at regular intervals, which he promised to do. Some lively fish and all of the mutilated ones were strung on a withy and carried back to camp. The injured ones were partly eaten, beginning at the tail, and although still able to move about were in a weak and dying condition.

The weather held cold for two or three days during which time we did not stir out of the camp. The lake froze fast. All through the days and nights the ice cracked and boomed under the influence of the frost, and Worth declared the noise must keep the fish awake. At times unusually loud bangs would startle us in the middle of the night and we would be kept awake to listen to the hollow grumblings of the imprisoned air. On inspecting by daylight one of the fractures which ran here and there through the forming ice, we discovered that three inches had already been made, and this was amply strong enough to sustain our weight. Worth quoted the old rule of the books:—one and a half inches thick will support a man; four inches will support cavalry; five inches, an eighty-four

pound cannon; ten inches, an army; and eighteen inches thick will support a railroad train. We walked all around the shores at will, but did not venture across the lake.

The batteau lay on the shore, partly out of the water. We had not anticipated the rapid coming of the ice and the boat was now gripped fast by the stern. We had no present use for her and so allowed her to remain where she was.

On looking at our muskrat traps for the first time in several days we found them under a foot of snow. We broke them out with the aid of the old shovel and the axe and found three rats dead and frozen in them. Their winding sheet of pure white gave no hint of their presence underneath. One trap we could not find as the whole surface of the swamp presented a flat and uniform appearance with hardly a mark to distinguish one place from another, and we could not locate the missing one. Some low bushes scattered round the edges bore a few red berries which resembled cranberries. In the hope that they might prove such we gathered a few to take back to camp. Sass could tell us if they were edible or not, and if they were they

would be just what we needed to qualify our heavy diet. We reset the traps, chopping holes for some of them in the ice in the brook close under the banks where the rats were most likely to travel to and from their houses.

During the next night the wind changed to the southeast and the weather grew rapidly warmer. This had been a severe spell of winter for so early in the season, and we were glad to hear the water dripping from the eaves of the camp when we got up. The weather was cloudy. Clear ice covered the lake. No snow had fallen since it had begun to freeze. Strange how black the water looked under the clear crystal covering. We chopped a water hole fifty yards from shore where the lake was deep, and set up a stake there holding a shovel and a pail. The shovel was to break the thin ice which would form overnight and to scoop clear floating pieces when necessary.

Our wood pile back of the stove had dwindled steadily during the last few days, and Worth took the axe to go to a pile of lumber near the mill for a fresh supply. I heard the sound of his chopping while I was cooking breakfast. Suddenly a startled yell outside caused me to

drop the boiling coffee pot which I was removing from the stove. I hastily picked it up from the floor and made a dash for the door, flinging it open just as Worth came running full tilt against it. He had neither axe nor kindling wood with him.

"Get the shotgun," he shouted excitedly, "a bob-cat—a tremendous fellow—is in the tree right over the wood pile. I heard a noise over my head and when I looked up this fellow was lying along a big limb with his big furry head over the side, looking at me. Hurry up, and we'll get him."

Seizing the gun I made a flying leap out of the door and ran at full speed towards the tree—a big hemlock, which raised its bushy head close to the edge of the woods. I was too late, however, the beast had jumped down while Worth was sprinting to the camp, and only a number of deep holes in the snow showed where the creature had bounded out of sight behind the thickets. While we stood there we heard the familiar, yowling cry of the lynx off in the woods, sounding as if the big cat was hungry and disappointed at not getting a portion of the muskrat carcasses which were hanging against

the house. Those undoubtedly were what had drawn the beast to the spot.

"What did he look like?" I asked, for I had never seen one of these creatures.

"Just like a huge cat; large, fuzzy-looking head with short, pointed ears and whiskers. He had a stubby little tail and big round feet."

"What color was he?"

"A sort of red, I think. I noticed some black spots along his belly, too. His under part looked white."

"Must have been a bay lynx then. The true Canada lynx is of a stone gray color and is larger than the bay lynx. He is more savage, too, I have heard."

"This fellow looked savage enough to eat babies before breakfast and think nothing of it, either. I tell you I was scared."

"Lucky thing he lit out so peacefully—lucky for you, I mean."

"For the lynx, you should say. When he saw me he was scared to death. That's the reason he skeedaddled so quickly, you may be sure of that."

"Nonsense, man. When he saw those long legs of yours extending themselves over the

ground at the rate of a mile a minute he got disgusted and left the neighborhood at once. He thought an animal that could run as fast as that must have little meat on its bones, I guess."

"Huh! If you had been under those big, clawed feet you'd never have stopped to see what kind of head or tail he had, as I did, you bet."

I was a little doubtful if I would, so forbore to argue further, and we went back to camp for breakfast.

CHAPTER XVIII

WALKING A LINE

Our "saple" line was to be visited that day, as the warm wind had softened the snow crust sufficiently to make getting at our traps comparatively easy. We doubted if anything had been caught. The sudden storm had covered and frozen everything up completely, but the traps must be dug out and reset at once.

Taking the snowshoes, which we now had become quite expert in using, also both guns, the axe, and a little grub, with a drag composed of deer entrails and flayed rats which we carried temporarily tied up in a bundle, we started over the ice towards the dam. The crystal sheet was booming again, this time under the influence of the warm wind just as it had done when the frost was hardening it. Worth explained this by saying that it was the simple contraction and expansion of imprisoned air, both in the ice and under it, causing the hollow groaning by trying

to free itself from confinement. I did not dispute this; it probably was the true reason.

At Big Averil we looked over the whole lake, —a wintry scene, indeed. Ice and distant snow-covered mountains with dark forests hanging like black patches on their sides; the nearby wooded shores solitary as in the days of Columbus,—this was all that we saw.

Sass was nowhere visible although he dwelt on this lake—neighbor to the fish, the marten and the lynx—a sufficiently primitive community to dwell among. We dropped our drag on the ice as we went along in case any animal should cross the lake and be minded to investigate the enticing lure. Reaching the upper end we fastened the snowshoes securely on and began a soft "swishing" glide through the forest. It was remarkable how easy and swift our progress was. Partridges rose in large numbers as we advanced. Our ears would be saluted with a startling boom and rapid beating of wings, and away the birds would fly like cannon balls. Worth made a reaching shot after one but missed.

Our first deadfall was empty and appeared forlorn and unattractive enough,—to us. Cov-

ered with snow, it loomed up strange and unusual in the quiet woods. It did not seem as if any animal with common sense would walk into it deliberately and get its back broken by such a simple contrivance, but when we looked into the little cuddy and saw (and smelt) the piece of muskrat meat sticking on the trigger, we understood how a hungry creature could brave almost anything in bleak winter weather to satisfy its natural craving for food. Taking advantage of this inborn necessity the trapper seeks and slays the rarest and shyest animals in the woods, not by reason of his superior cunning, nor by his clever craftsmanship, but by working on the universal law which compels all living creatures to eat and drink, and perform the other necessary offices of their natures.

Aside from clearing away a little accumulated snow on the logs, we had nothing to do here, and marking our next "blaze" which was visible on a hard maple ahead we continued on to the next deadfall. Nothing was found here either, nor yet in the next one. Baits were untouched, and the snow untrodden around them. We came at last on one of Sass's bear pens; some animal had been at this trap for it was knocked

all to pieces and the bait was gone. It looked as if human hands had done the work, so complete was the destruction. The log weight had rolled away to one side and the stakes bent over. The little house was demolished. Tracks—large ones—were visible in the melting snow leading off in the woods, and Worth studied them for a long time.

"Bear," he said finally—"or something else like it. Pretty strong animal whatever it was to knock a trap to pieces like that."

"Think we ought to follow him?" I asked. "Old tracks, though, I guess, and not much use to do it. He is miles away by this time."

"No sense in doing it now," agreed Worth. "Let's keep right on to the ridge. Too long a line to go over to waste any time on side trips."

We found a fine marten in the next trap; back broken some days before; a nice skin with full, heavy tail. These weasels have a long body with remarkably short legs. They are active and shy creatures.

By the time we finished the line through Averil woods we had secured another marten, all the other traps being undisturbed. We had cleaned them all of snow and rebaited them

where necessary. Our drag had left a mark for five miles over the snow between them, and with good weather we now felt confident of getting good results. The ridge was reached about noon. The air had become warm and pleasant and the sun bright, with little wind. We sat on a log and ate our lunch. The view over the white country from this point was very fine. We enjoyed it in peace for fully half an hour.

Our line of steel traps was stretched along this ridge for miles and we wondered what luck had befallen us here. Not very much, we thought, as most of the traps were frozen in and would not spring even if an animal trod on them. We resumed our journey and dug out two Newhouse traps from under eight inches of snow with nothing in them. They were in working order, though, we discovered, as the snow under the icy crust had remained soft close to the ground and this protected them. We were soon to come on a surprise, however, for on topping a slight rise where a large 4⅞-inch had been left attached to a heavy clog, nothing was to be seen of it, both trap and log having disappeared entirely. A trampling in the snow explained things; some animal had been caught a day or

two before, and his broad trail led down into the valley showing where the clog had been dragged along at a rapid rate. Worth uttered a whoop of delight and dashed down the slope in pursuit. I followed, no less excited.

"What do you think of it," called out Worth ahead, "these tracks are mostly wiped out by the clogs so's I can't tell—great Jupiter! A lynx—here's his big feet showing plainly." It was a lynx beyond doubt; there was no mistaking the round, deep holes made by the creature bounding along, making towards the stream, and thence along the bottom of the valley to the thickets. Into the bushes and out again he had rushed in a vain attempt to free himself. The clog had caught here and there; in one place marks showed where he had circled round and round for a long time before he could extricate himself. The trap had held firmly, though; he must be caught securely, high up on a hind leg, we thought.

We followed him for fully two miles. The animal must have taken many hours to go this distance, for his pace showed exhaustion; no longer was it a series of bounds, but a slow, and probably painful, walk. The delays caused by

numerous obstructions made his journey a difficult one. The tracks led into a swampy place, full of holes and water and covered with a dense growth of alders and willows.

"We'll find him in here," exclaimed Worth confidently. "He can't go far with that trap and clog on his leg. Maybe he's close by us now. Go easy, boy."

We advanced cautiously, avoiding the wet places as much as possible, and penetrated a quarter of a mile into the brake, still following the plain marks of the lynx's progress. Our guns were held ready for use, for the savage cat might leap out from among the thickets at any moment. We did not want to get too close to him. A cornered lynx is a dangerous animal, whatever he may be when he sees a chance to get away. Suddenly we heard a snarling yell not far ahead, and a smashing noise among the bushes. We stopped and listened, cocking our guns as we did so.

"That's the old fellow within fifty yards of us," exclaimed Worth. "Isn't he in a sweet temper?"

We heard a rushing about for a few moments, and then all was still again. We edged for-

ward a little ways to where the alders opened out, affording a glimpse beyond and as we did so the cat sprang into view from a clump of bushes behind which he had been hiding, and made straight for us, yowling and spitting ferociously. Our first impulse was to fire at him, but on seeing that he was incapable of reaching us as his progress was hampered by the clog which he jerked along painfully, we stopped at a safe distance and regarded him with curiosity. He was a bay lynx of medium size with a big head and furry feet, one of which, a hind one, as we had surmised was fast in the trap, bloody and torn. Worth declared he was the same one he had seen at the camp. How he could tell I do not know. The snow around the place where he had been hiding was spotted with red from his wounded leg and the trap tore it still further apart at every jump he made. We resolved to kill him at once and put him out of his misery. As we advanced, the lynx having stopped in his tracks and regarding us with evil eyes, he suddenly turned and made for a tree, up which he tried to climb dragging trap and clog after him. Worth ran towards him with the rifle and taking aim at the back of his head,

pulled the trigger. With a snuffling, choking cry the creature fell back with a thud on the snow, and lay there, kicking convulsively. He was soon quiet, the bullet having shattered his jaw and head, killing him almost instantly. We skinned him while he was yet warm. His pelt, of a beautiful reddish brown shading to a white on the belly, with irregular black splotches on the under side, was hung on a bush. We found a new place for the trap on the ridge and set and rebaited it. When we came back the skin looked so remarkably like the lynx himself trying to climb over a thicket that we were quite startled for a second or two.

Retracing our steps to where we had started down the valley we looked at the traps which we had passed on the ridge. All were empty and all had to be dug out and fixed anew. Along the brook we found most of the mink traps in bad condition. Many were frozen in the solid ice, and it was a job chopping them out. In one was a mink, stiff and cold. We slung him as he was on our load. Nothing else rewarded our day's tramp. We were well satisfied, considering the unfavorable weather conditions and intense cold which had prevailed for several

days. Perhaps such weather conditions might make an animal more hungry and reckless; but on the other hand they also must have their effect in keeping many creatures under cover for a while.

We reached the camp towards nightfall, tired out and ravenous for food. Our snowshoes had done us good service on the long journey of twelve miles. Without them it would have been almost impossible to make such a trip.

We quickly had a fire going, and deer meat cooking in a pan. The mink was skinned and with the other peltry was stretched and hung in the mill before the evening got too dark for us to see. The weather was growing colder again as night came on. We could hear the lake booming as the ice again contracted. Altogether, we had experienced an eventful and tiresome day.

For two or three days we saw nothing of Sass. Weather continued cold, the temperature reaching just above the freezing point during the day and sinking ten or fifteen degrees at night. Our trap line was not disturbed during this time. We thought once a week was often enough to go over it during the winter days. We might

lose a fur animal or two through its escaping from a trap, but the labor involved in walking the line often was considerable. Yet we disliked to leave any creature to suffer longer than necessary. We saw no remedy, however, save to make fairly frequent visits along our line and this we expected to do. Another thing, we must give the fur animals time to find the traps, and three or four days was none too short for so many of them.

Nearly every day we saw the large bird which frequented Nulhegan mountain. It generally was slowly circling high up around its summit for an hour or two every morning scanning the snow beneath, then would sail majestically toward Big Averil. We were sure it was an eagle. Once we saw two of them close to the summit. Whether both lived on the mountain we could not say. One did, we were sure, and a fierce, bold fellow he was. One morning we were down at the deadwater examining our muskrat traps. We saw the eagle as usual spiraling about in the brilliant sunshine high over Nulhegan. We stopped to watch him. One of our traps was some fifty yards from us and had a muskrat in it. The rat was squeaking and drag-

ging the light trap about. As we looked we saw the huge bird descend—first in slow circles to half-way down the mountain side, then it poised its wings at an angle and shot down like a thunderbolt towards the rat. We heard its rushing flight through the air from where we stood. In a second or two it struck and gripped the muskrat in its talons and the little animal struggled in terror to get away. The eagle rose off the ground immediately, carrying trap and all with it, and as the chain drew taut the poor rat was torn from it, leaving a hind leg behind, and was carried up to the top of the mountain where eagle and rat both disappeared. The bird probably had its eyrie there, hidden in some cleft in the rocks. We had a clear view of him —golden brown in color, with a large, hooked beak, and long talons on his feathered legs. Worth said it was a fine specimen of the American golden eagle. We might have shot it for we had a gun with us, but everything happened so quickly that we had not time to make up our minds before all was over and the opportunity lost. Yet I doubt if I would have killed the noble bird anyway; we had no use for him and killing uselessly was no part of our policy in

the woods. Later on, though, this grand fellow fell a victim to Worth's strategy, as I shall describe on a future page.

We had barely got back to camp when we heard a succession of shots in the direction of Big Averil Lake. Four or five guns were discharged one after another, the sounds coming clear but faint on the frosty air. We stepped out on the porch and listened intently wondering what was causing the racket. It could not be the colored man doing it; he had but one old gun which we seldom heard go off, and now several of them were fired rapidly. It sounded like a skirmish going on. After listening a long time we went in again. No more shots were heard and everything was silent as usual in the direction of the lake.

"What in tarnation was that for?" exclaimed Worth in a puzzled voice. "Must be some new arrivals over there. I wonder who they can be?"

"There's some party going down the lake, that's very certain," I said. "Hope it's nobody going to trap about here. No lumbering going on now for miles around, so it can't be a lumber gang. Hard to say who it is."

We mystified ourselves for the greater part of the morning over the occurrence, but towards noon we heard Sass's steps outside, and the old man opened the door in a great hurry.

CHAPTER XIX

A CANADIAN INVASION

The negro hopped into the house quickly, his china eyes rolling in an excited manner.

"How do, gem'men. What you belieb happen dis mornin'?" he asked abruptly.

"Don't know, Sass; what was it?" replied Worth.

"Dem —— Canucks hab come again, five ob dem. De dirty scoun'rels went up de lake dis mornin' a-singin' an' a-yellin'. Dey got two sleds draggin' 'long wid 'em, an' a couple ob cussed dorgs trapesin' 'round."

"What were they shooting at?" I inquired. "We heard five guns go off."

"Dat's what you did," answered Sass grimly. "Dey fired dem shots right through mah cabin roof when dey got clus' enough. Lucky I was in de bresh at de time or I might hab got some ob de shot in me, too." Sass had a stock of profane language, as we now discovered, for he swore freely during his recital.

"That's no way for them to act. What did the villains shoot you up for?" exclaimed Worth indignantly; "they must be lawless characters to do such a thing."

"Lawless ain't no name for it," returned Sass savagely. "Dey's de scum ob de yearth; dey'd shoot a man quick'rn look at him."

"Hope they don't come over here then," observed Worth decidedly, "for if they do there's bound to be trouble. We won't stand nonsense of that kind, as they'll soon find out."

"You kin expec' 'em sure an' sartin," said Sass. "Dem fellers is a-goin' to stay round de lakes all winter, and dey'll raise de debble yere too. Dey went down to de foot ob de lake dis mornin', an' I heerd 'em a-comin' back when I started ober to see you gem'men."

He had hardly ceased talking when we heard dogs barking outside and the sound of voices engaged in loud conversation. We rushed to the door, threw it open, and crowded round it to look.

On the ice-covered lake close to the shore we saw five men walking, and two dogs. They were coming rapidly towards us dragging two hand-sleds loaded with duffle. A most villain-

ous-looking crew they were, ragged and unkempt, with fur caps pulled down over their ears and snowshoes slung on their backs. Each man had a gun in his hand. Their most distinguishing characteristics outwardly were those of barroom brawlers, and Worth volunteered the belief that they had more whiskey stowed away on their sleds than anything else.

Reaching the shore, they jerked the sleds upon the snow and continued in a body to the house. The dogs chased round them barking at everything they saw and the men volleyed curses and exchanged remarks in a mixture of English and "patois"—altogether a general hubbub. They saw us in the doorway and one of them said with a jeering laugh to the rest: "Dat tam nigger has moved away; he's in dees camp now."

"We'll rout him out, me bye," said another man, evidently with some Irish blood in him. "Who the devil else is here; there's two more min in the house."

"Hallo, there!" he continued, addressing us when he got near enough and forcing a grin which disclosed a lot of yellow teeth. "What yer doin' here; keepin' a hotel?"

We maintained silence. We didn't want any

truck with these people who we felt had no right in the camp, but neither did we want any trouble with them. We made no move as they continued to approach. Our conduct seemed to ruffle the temper of the Irishman. When he got to the house, with the other men swaggering behind, he growled with an oath.

"I believe these people are dummies and can't talk at all, at all. Here, you nagur, why ain't you over to your own house? You don't belong in this camp, me black man, so put your ould legs in motion and quit here at wance."

This brutal and direct remark roused Sass's ordinarily peaceful nature and he pushed himself out from behind us and boldly confronted the bully.

"I belong hyar jes' as much as you do," he replied, his wrinkled visage distorted with rage, "an' I worked in dis camp earnin' hones' money when you was a-layin' roun' hyar some'ers drunk in de woods."

A loud guffaw broke from the gang and seemed to disconcert the Irishman, for he turned to his companions with a sickly smile on his face and assured them in an undertone that he would "do" for the black fellow yet.

"You shot up mah cabin dis mornin'," continued Sass, eyeing the man steadily, "an' I want to know what you do dat for? Ef I had mah gun wid me I'd a shot some o' you men right dar."

"Stow your jaw!" growled the man fiercely. "Don't want no more talk out of ye. Well, mates," he continued, turning to us, "you don't appear to be over and above civil, but we'll have to disturb you some, I reckon. We goin' to put up here for a spell. Bad weather to live outdoors, ye know." This cool announcement staggered us.

We had possession of the camp and were entitled to keep it. Such a gang as they were, too—whiskey-soaked creatures all of them. Already the half-breeds had begun to make themselves at home. Guns and snowshoes were dropped on the porch and sled covers taken off showing a large cargo of various articles underneath,—traps, provisions, and one or two fresh skins.

"We don't know that we can accommodate you," I said firmly. "We have been here for some time and this is our camp. Can't you

build a shack somewhere? Plenty of boards to be had here."

"Dat tam cool of heem," one of the Canadians said sneeringly. "Go in de hoose, Beel. We got de permeesion to use dees camp."

"Yes, that's so, me byes," exclaimed the Irishman. "We got the roight to use the camp. Plenty a room—lashins of it. You fellows can use the larft overhead. We won't drive yez out." At the same time he attempted to push past us but Worth interposed and for a moment I thought there was going to be a fight. Sass growled like an enraged bear and cast a longing glance at the guns standing in a corner. I nudged Worth hastily and whispered to him to be careful. Reluctantly we drew to one side and the newcomers crowded through the door and entered the house.

"This camp doesn't belong to us, Worth," I said. "They said they had permission to use it. Do you suppose they have?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. It's possible. But they came from the Canada side, and how could they have any influence in getting the camp from Mr. Butterfield at Burlington? It isn't likely."

"No, I believe they're lying. Nevertheless we can't prove that just now. We'll have to grin and bear it. Hear the scoundrels inside—what a row they're making."

A confused medley of noises came from the invaders. We had flattered ourselves on our good housekeeping, but the warm fire, clean pots and pans, and neat bed of marsh hay under the woolen blankets only drew various coarse jests from the Canucks. Probably not one of them had ever seen such comfortable arrangements in his life before.

"Say, Beel, you tak dees big bunk. I s'all sleep wid you, hein?"

"Grub on de stove too, all ready for us—deer meat too, by ——. These young fellers are livin' pretty goot, I tall yar."

"Now byes, bring the duds in and make ourselves at home. Jean Ba'tiste, you're the cook. Get some grub off the sleds and set to worruk. I'm hongry as anny catamount in these mountings."

"Ze hot stew is all ready, Beel. Do you want anyzing more as dat for deener?"

"The stew belongs to the byes. Go and do as I bid ye, and shut up."

A couple of the half-breeds came outside and carried in their guns, also various articles from the sleds. They gave us an impudent grin as they passed us at the door. We went in, also, and saw they had taken complete possession of the house. One dirty fellow was sprawled in our bunk, smoking a pipe, his wet boots reposing on the blankets. Others were seated on the bench, passing back and forth a jug, from which each took a generous drink. Bill, the leader, stood by the stove with his coat off, warming his back, and he saluted us with a patronizing wave of the hand.

"Come in, byes, don't be bashful. We'll live together loike a lot o' toortle doves. Have a drink, won't ye? Antoine pass the jug. Don't be after makin' a hog o' yoursilf."

We declined to drink. Seeing no place to sit we remained standing by the door gazing at the band with angry feelings. What a change from the quiet security of a few hours before! For a while we had serious thoughts of driving all of them off the premises by force. But there were five against three,—all husky men—and with arms at hand to defend themselves. It seemed too risky an undertaking. Perhaps if

we had known before what we saw now, viz.: that they intended to gradually freeze us out of the camp, we should have barred them at once and warned them off with cocked guns. We regretted now that we hadn't done so, but it was too late.

"Look here, ye black man," said Bill, addressing Sass again. "You don't belong here at all, as I tould you before. We haven't room for yer and ye must git back to yer own shack at wanst. You hear me!"

"What the devil do you mean," exclaimed Worth, advancing on him with blazing eyes. "Let the man alone. He'll stay here as long as we do—"

"An dat weel not be long, eider," interrupted one of the half-breeds on the bench, winking at his companions, who grinned appreciatively. "You weel all go ver' soon, sares."

"You are here now," continued Worth, regarding Bill with indignation; "more's the pity; but if you're to remain here you must keep a civil tongue in your head. Give us a fair show or there'll be trouble in the camp." He walked over to the corner and seized our two guns, giving one to me. We felt better with these in

our hands. There was no telling what the gang might do before night.

Paying no further attention to them we placed our pans on the table and sat down with Sass to dinner. We used up-ended logs to sit down upon. The Canucks occupied the bench and whispered among themselves. An occasional guffaw over something which they discussed reached our ears.

Sass took his departure for home soon after. He inquired if we needed him for anything, but we said no. Things must shape out of themselves—they were bound to do so before long. It would be either the invaders or ourselves who would remain in the camp but not both, we felt convinced.

The gang prospected the place and discovered our stock of furs in the loft. Bill complimented us on our run of luck. They were there for skins themselves, he said. They had a lot of old rusty traps with them. He inquired where our trap line was, but Worth told him that was our business. We wanted no dealings with them.

We remained in the house all afternoon keeping a watchful eye on the crowd. They did

nothing but sprawl round the rooms drinking out of the jug, and singing French songs. As the whiskey got in its effects they became uproarious, dancing and embracing each other in a disgusting fashion. Bill himself did not drink much; he seemed to be cogitating something, for we caught his shifty eyes fixed on us several times. He hastily turned them away when we looked, as if to hide his thoughts from us.

When night came, the Canucks occupied all the bunks except the large one which we had taken care to pre-empt early and which we resolved to keep at all hazards. It was nauseating for us to sleep in the same room with the foul-smelling and bleary-eyed crowd but there was no help for it. Bill rolled himself in a blanket and slept on the floor by the fire. We got but little rest that night, the two ill-conditioned curs which accompanied the gang kept prowling and snuffing about the room most of the night, and this, together with the snoring of the whole crowd, rendered sleep almost impossible.

In the morning we got up early and washed our faces in cold water and combed our hair,

much to the amusement of the various members of the gang, whose frowsy appearance at all times attested to the fact that they never did these things themselves. While Worth was shouldering his way around the room, trying to get breakfast ready, he kicked one of the dogs out of his way. It ran yelping into a corner. Jean Ba'tiste apparently owned the dog and was using the stove in his capacity as cook for the party. He uttered a fierce *"sacre"* and glowered in a menacing manner on Worth, who, however, paid no attention to him.

What to do with ourselves during the day we did not know. To leave the camp would be to place all our belongings at the mercy of the newcomers who already were making use of our cooking utensils and monopolizing the fire and the bunks. They would turn us out altogether at the first opportunity, of this we felt assured. My comrade expressed the belief that we would have to fight for our privilege of staying before long. We finally went down to the lake and gazed moodily around. It was a bright, cold day, just the weather to walk our trap line, but the risk of coming back and finding our furs and other possessions vanished with the intrud-

ers was too great. Bill, as being the brains of the party, we believed was meditating mischief, and it would probably take form in some such manner as that. Still, we might be doing them an injustice after all. They might prove only a disagreeable nuisance for a time and then leave the camp for some other roystering place. Time would tell.

CHAPTER XX

DRIVEN OUT

But we were soon undeceived in our charitable conclusions. Short as was our absence, matters had taken a decided change for the worse when we returned. The Canucks had established themselves practically as the sole occupants of the camp. Their clothing and duffle were scattered all about the place; our bunk had been despoiled of its blankets which were flung into a corner and some greasy bed clothing, belonging, no doubt, to Bill, had been put in their place. Bill, himself, was lying full length there smoking an old black pipe. He eyed us furtively when we came in but said nothing. The rest of the gang were talking noisily together as we entered but their gabble ceased and they watched us curiously.

Something prompted me to go to the loft. There our suspicions as to the intentions of the gang were confirmed—the otter skin and three of the martens had disappeared. I looked all

around the loft but saw nothing of them. Clearly they had been abstracted and hidden by the thieves downstairs. I called to Worth to come up and he was furious when he saw what had occurred. Running downstairs he strode into the room past the Canucks on the bench and stood directly before Bill, who was still lying calmly smoking in our bunk.

"Where are those skins?" he demanded abruptly. "Someone has taken four of them and I want to know where they are."

Bill pretended great surprise. "Four of thim furs gone?" he replied in an injured tone. "Sure I don't know anything about thim. I been in my bunk the hull mornin'."

"In *your* bunk, you scoundrel!" shouted Worth in a fury, "in *our* bunk, you mean. What do you think you're going to do here—rob people and then drive them out of the house? I want that otter skin and the martens, and I believe you've got them, too."

"Hard worruds, me bye," answered Bill soothingly. "I ain't got thim an' I don't know who has. I ain't sure you had 'em to begin with."

The half-breeds had crowded round with

grinning faces. Worth turned on them savagely. "Which of you men took those skins out of the loft? Answer me or there'll be trouble."

"Nobody took heem," said Jean Ba'tiste in a blustering tone. "What you mean, hein, tellin' people dey was r-r-robbers? You pack heem off and lose it somewhare, dat's all."

"I think you all are a pack of thieves and liars," shouted Worth. But the Canucks only grinned at us. We searched the place thoroughly but the skins were not found. Wherever they were they had been cleverly concealed. All we could do after that was to watch the gang closely and endeavor to frustrate any further deviltry they might be up to. The crisis of affairs came that night. Bill kept in our bunk all day, smoking and drinking hard. When night came, rather than face a fight, we bunked on the floor leaving the Canucks in possession of all the premises except the space we occupied on the hard boards. It was almost unbearable. The crowd was half drunk, as usual, and gibes and curses came to our ears. We gritted our teeth as we turned uneasily in our uncomfortable places. At length Worth, exasperated beyond endurance and seeing that the matter must

be settled one way or the other as we could not live that way another hour and remain in the camp, jumped up and ran into the bunk-room. He seized Bill by the neck and hauled him bodily out of the bunk.

"Here, you!" shouted Worth, "get out of this, all of you; I'll teach you fellows some manners, if you haven't got any. Get the guns," he called out sharply to me. "We'll drive these scoundrels out for good and all." I immediately sprang for the rifle and shotgun in the corner, but they were not there. I heard a yell from Worth and looking hastily around saw Jean Ba'tiste and two others piled on top of him, choking and beating him unmercifully. The remainder of the half-breeds, one of whom covered me with my own gun, told me to get down on my knees to save "my tam Yenkee life." They were drunk enough to carry out their threat, too, I thought. But I scorned to humiliate myself in that manner and merely folded my arms, remaining quiet while Worth was quickly overpowered and held fast by the crowd. Then Bill got up and passed judgment on us.

"You two min must quit this shanty at wanst. We won't have you here any more. Git!!"

This was all he said. We were driven out of the camp at the muzzles of guns, and Bill, leveling his rifle at us from the open doorway with an unsteady hand, swore he would kill us if we showed up there again. The door was slammed in our faces and we were left in the winter night with only our ordinary clothing on to keep us from freezing to death. Our arms, provisions and furs were in possession of the enemy. While we stood before the camp, too stunned to think what to do, the door opened again and a shot whistled past us. We caught a glimpse of Jean Ba'tiste in the doorway who yelled out to us to "git away from thar," with a volley of curses. The gang then lit two or three of our precious candles and held a jollification inside, dancing and singing with the utmost glee over our discomfiture.

The only course left for us was to try and get to Sass's cabin. It was out of the question for anyone to sleep outdoors in that weather. We cursed the whole breed of Canucks as we plodded the trail through the woods to Big Averil Lake,—a rough journey in the dark—but we knew the road and reached Sass's hut in safety. The negro was the most indignant man

ever seen when we told him our story. We sat up half the night plotting how to circumvent the villains but came to no definite conclusion. And it was not to be as we wished anyway, for at daylight we were surprised by the whole band bursting in at the door. They took the upper hand at once, ordering us out of the cabin and then Bill, with his own hands, set fire to the shack. They kept us covered all the time so that we could do nothing but view the scene with gloomy anticipations of what was to follow.

When the place was nearly gone, Bill turned to us and pointing over the trail told us to go back at a trot to the camp. We did as directed. On reaching it we were not allowed to stop but kept on at the double along the timber road for a mile towards the settlements. Then Bill, flourishing his gun, told us to make our way there as quickly as we could and not to come back.

We would not beg of these fellows but I could not help turning to Bill and asking him how he expected us to reach the settlements without food or proper clothing,—we would die on the road. Bill, who seemed not altogether bad in spite of

his recent high-handed proceedings, hesitated for a moment as if he had a mind to help us in some way but that shifty-eyed scoundrel, Jean Ba'tiste, interposed.

"You mog along ze road and don't waste more as ze time. Travail; go, night and day. You get to ze settlements vera queeck. You heer a me, mog."

The rest of them swore the same thing—that we should go as we were, and Bill shrugged his shoulders. There was no help for it. We turned away and walked slowly up the road until we lost sight of the Canucks behind a hill. They stood and watched us until then. We heard a volley of shots and some yelling far in the rear, and then all was silent.

When we had gone a mile further, all buried in gloomy reflection at this sad ending of our expedition to the woods, Worth broke the silence as follows:

"I've heard of Indian torture and deviltry, but this villainy beats them all. We can't make a thirty mile journey through the snow in our condition, for we shall certainly starve or freeze long before we get through. To think of those rascals robbing people, turning them out of

doors, and burning down houses at will makes my blood boil."

"They are a heartless and a lawless crew," I replied. "They have lived a rough life and don't care a rap for right or justice. All they are after is possession of a good camp for the winter and to steal our furs."

"Dey'll find yo' trap line, too," exclaimed Sass, whose rheumatism was bad again and who was limping painfully along trying to keep up with us. "Dose fellers knows what dey're 'bout, you kin bet. Dey tink dis an easy way to get fixed for dey're winter trappin'."

Worth suddenly stopped.

"I won't go a step further. I've got a plan, men. What's to hinder us from staying around here a few days and making a raid on the camp some night when the Canucks think we've gone for good?"

"Where shall we stay?" I asked, looking doubtfully over the dreary woods which closed us in on all sides.

"In the marble cave!" exclaimed Worth, his eyes shining with sudden resolve. "We can find shelter there, and warmth. We'll keep a fire going night and day. And then—" he clenched

his fist and shook it in the direction of the camp.

"The very thing," I said, "but we must have food. We've got no guns to shoot anything with."

"We don't want to shoot anything; that would let the Canucks know we're still in the neighborhood—the very thing we must avoid. But there's our trap line—what's to prevent our taking up some of the smaller traps and setting them on the thickets for rabbits? Plenty of tracks around the swamps."

"Hurrah!" I yelled in delight. "We'll get them yet." Sass's smile was wonderful to see; it extended from ear to ear, and he flourished a pole which he had picked up in a most dangerous manner.

"Now, comrades," said Worth, "the Canucks may follow us for some distance to see if we actually have gone. We will tramp along here another mile to make a convincing sign for them and then strike at once for the cave. I judge that it is only about three miles from where we stand."

We made a fake trail through the snow for about the distance Worth had suggested, and

then boldly plunged into the brush on one side of the wood and made our way westward until we came to the little valley. Along this we followed for half a mile until we reached the cave. Clambering up the side of the hill we stooped and crawled into the entrance on our hands and knees. Sass, who brought up the rear, kept uttering ejaculations of astonishment and when we emerged into the chamber the black man's wonder knew no bounds.

"Well, I declar to goodness, dis is de wonnerfulest ting I'se yit seen. I nevah knowed dere was anyting like dis roun' de lakes. When you gem'men fin' dis place?"

We told him about the discovery and he laughed and chuckled with satisfaction as he said, "Dis'll be jest de place to stay 'till we gits squar wid dem Canooks. De fust ting to do is to git some wood and make a fire. Rain come in yere?" he asked as his eyes sought the little hole in the roof.

"Not much of it, I believe," I said. "The opening runs in a slanting direction, so it can't leak much. This will have to do anyway; no other place for us to go."

We were tired and hungry, having had no

food since the preceding day, but set to work at once gathering wood which we stored in the cave. We collected hemlock boughs for bedding and strewed them over the floor in one corner. A fire was started as soon as possible. We always carried matches in little corked glass vials, and this habit was never more useful to us than on the present occasion. We were thankful to find that the air in the chamber warmed up quickly, the smoke pouring out of the hole above as from a regular chimney.

Our most necessary requisite was food, for we were nearly starved by this time.

"I suppose we'd better get in a few traps," said Worth; "the sooner the better, for we must have something to eat very soon."

We left Sass in the cave while we went along the ridge collecting some of the smaller ones. We were afraid the gang might see our fresh tracks in the snow if they should find the line, but it could not be helped. Perhaps they were not woodsmen enough to note such a detail, and if they were no doubt they would be too drunk to realize its significance.

We obtained five of the traps and set them in various runways in the swamps, covered lightly

with snow, and then withdrew hoping that on the coming night the rabbits would be out in force and one or two of them might get into the traps.

The night passed slowly in our new quarters. I slept fitfully, and at each period of waking saw Sass sitting hunched up by the fire brooding over something—perhaps dreams of vengeance which flitted before his African soul. In the morning we sallied out and were overjoyed to find that a rabbit had been caught. The swamp was a good place for them. Enough could be secured to sustain us until our attack was made on the camp, we thought.

Three days passed in a dreary round. We were kept warm and did not starve, and that is about all. Sass's tobacco had given out, and this he missed greatly. We uttered many hard words against the Canucks. On the afternoon of the third day we heard dogs barking in the woods. Worth and I crawled to the mouth of the cave and looked cautiously out, and soon saw the dogs belonging to the gang circling round on the ridge, about a quarter mile from us. We did not see the men. Soon shouts were heard and all of the invaders but one—I did not see

Bill—came into view. They evidently had been following our trap line and we could see several pelts hanging over their shoulders. We ground our teeth at the sight.

"They've got half a dozen marten skins there," said Worth savagely. "If I had my gun I'd shoot one of those fellows from here—the thieves!"

"That would be foolish," I replied. "They could blockade us in this hole and starve us to death. If they once know we're in the woods it will be good-bye to the camp. It's our best chance to keep quiet."

The hunters did not see our hiding place. They looked up and down the valley, stamped about for a while and talked, while the dogs ran about sniffing on every trail they met. We were sorely afraid the latter would cross the valley and strike our scent, but fortunately they did not do this. Then all hands retraced their steps along the ridge.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ATTACK ON THE CAMP

We spent six days in the cave. The night came at last which we had selected for our desperate venture against the robbers. For weapons we each had a heavy hardwood club, two feet long, that could crack a skull very easily if the necessity arose. The gang would find this out if they resisted our regaining possession of the camp and our property too strongly. We had firmly resolved to use all the means in our power to accomplish this. The gang was utterly lawless; they would shoot us without mercy if we attacked them, of this we had no doubt. We knew we were taking our lives in our hands in the adventure.

On the day preceding this, however, we had stolen along the timber road to within half a mile of the camp and maneuvered cautiously through the woods until we got within sight of it. We lay in a thicket nearly the whole morning hoping for a chance to get into the camp

while the gang was away, and thus avoid a conflict; but some of the men were visible during all the morning. Three of them went down the lake but returned in about an hour. We then gave up the project and returned half frozen to the cave.

At dusk we were prepared to start. The moon was quartering low over the valley. A hundred points of diamond brightness had already appeared in the darkening sky, and a keen, cold wind sighed mournfully through the trees and swept over the frozen snow. We shivered as we reached the outer air. Our warm outer coats were in the possession of the Canucks and what we had on were far from being enough to protect us against a northern winter. Sass, who held a knotty club as thick as his arm firmly in one black fist, kept up steadily with us. An expression of grim determination was visible in his countenance as we traversed the woods in silence. Four miles lay between us and the camp. We calculated to reach it in two hours, and we knew we would have to wait for perhaps another two hours before things became quiet and the Canucks were buried in a more or less peaceful slumber. Two things worried

us. One was whether they had established a guard each night against such an attempt as we were engaged upon, and the other was how to avoid the two dogs at the camp. If the latter nuisances discovered us and started in full cry to rout us out it would be all up with our plans. But if we could reach the camp safely and get inside without alarming any of the gang we did not care for the dogs. We could take care of them at close quarters as we would of the men. Odds were largely against us, but a surprise sometimes works wonders in demoralizing superior numbers. We counted on getting possession of the guns at once. We knew where they were usually stacked, and our first rush would be for them.

The vicinity of the camp was reached without accident. The moon had gone down and the woods were dark, but the faint light reflected from the snow guided us to a point about twenty rods from the house. We could see a faint light shining through the cracks and hear the sound of drunken voices. The dogs were not visible; we rejoiced to find that they were housed for the night. This simplified matters. For a long time we lay quietly in the underbrush. I never

felt so cold in all my life. Our teeth were chattering but we did not move for fear of giving an alarm and thereby spoiling our only chance. We watched until the lights went out and the stillness of a cemetery gradually came over the scene.

When we thought the time was ripe we rose, so stiff we could hardly move, yet our bodies were trembling inwardly with excitement as we made our way towards the house. A faint crackling from the frozen snow crust which we did our utmost to avoid making, was audible, but we kept on doggedly. It was do or die now; there was no other way for us if we wished to survive that night's exposure.

We got to the door without accident. No sound came from within except a muffled snore. No one seemed to be on watch. The lapse of time since we were driven out had evidently satisfied the Canucks that we were gone from the neighborhood. We tried the door gently. There was no lock on it, but it would not open. Something was placed against it on the inside, probably a log of wood. A vigorous shove would start it, or we could break down the door with a combined effort. Worth and I drew

back, grasped our clubs firmly, and with Sass pressing behind us with a mighty bound crashed against the door. It fell open and almost off its hinges as we tumbled into the little entry. We immediately dashed into the room with our clubs uplifted, ready for anything that might happen.

The scene that followed beggars description. I could not tell now in a connected manner just what occurred—all was confusion, noise, and shouting. The first thing we did in the semi-darkness was to overturn the table. It fell to the floor with a crash that shook the whole house. One of the dogs sprang at me with a snarl. Sass was near and with a quick blow brought down his club on its head with a crack that sounded like a man breaking an eggshell. The dog dropped. Exclamations and oaths in French and English came from the bunk room. By the flickering light from the wood fire we saw the Canucks starting up from their sleeping places and wildly seeking their various weapons.

Worth and Sass had made a rush for the corner where the guns were known to be stacked. They were there, all but one; our guns were among them. With these in our hands and the

rest of them behind us out of the enemy's reach, Worth and Sass sprang to the doorway leading to the bunk room and leveled the guns at the advancing crowd.

"Hold up your hands, all of you!" shouted Worth, in a resolute tone. "The first man who steps forward gets killed."

The gang stopped in their tracks. Among them was the viperish Jean Ba'tiste, who had a gun in his hand, and with a quick movement he brought it to a level aimed directly at Worth's head. Before he could fire I sprang towards him and pushed the weapon to one side. I held my club over his head ready to strike as I yelled to him to surrender. Being naturally soft-hearted I hesitated to injure the Canadian and this almost proved the death of Worth. Jean Ba'tiste recovered command of his gun by jerking it under my outstretched arm and then fired it point blank at Worth's body. The charge tore past him, a trifle to one side, but the shot ripped and tore his clothing for a space of a foot long down his left side. The shock caused Worth to stagger back several feet. Maddened by the sight, the deafening report ringing in my ears and the pungent powder smoke half chok-

ing me, I drew back my arm and the next instant Jean Ba'tiste lay on the floor with a dent in his skull that took all the fight, speech and motion out of him for the next hour.

The rest of the crowd were now holding up their hands. Bill was in front with a scowl on his face which was not unmixed with fear. I took advantage of the lull in events to light a candle.

"Come out here, Bill!" ordered Worth, who soon recovered his coolness and nerve. "Come out and get your hands tied, old fellow. The rest of you stay where you are. Sass, cover them well with your gun. Shoot, if they move a step."

Sass obeyed like a veteran. The old man was brave. At Worth's command, Bill stepped forward. I got some stout fish line and wound it tightly round his wrists which I had twisted behind his back.

The rest of the half-breeds were treated in the same manner. They then were directed to go back into the bunk room and Sass mounted guard over them in the doorway with a gun in his grasp. Jean Ba'tiste had a bad-looking head and had

I got some stout fish line and wound it tightly round his wrists

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lost considerable blood. A pool of it lay on the floor. Although he had now recovered consciousness I was much afraid that his skull was fractured. I bathed the wound in warm water and bound it up as well as I could. The bandage was kept wet for two or three hours with hot water to take down the swelling, and we then laid him in a bunk among the others. The dead dog we threw outside. A more dejected crew of bleary-looking wretches probably was never seen. They sat round on the edges of bunks, Bill on his royal couch—the double bunk. In our delight and relief at being once more in possession of our comfortable quarters we could not forbear indulging in a little badinage with them.

"Bill, you played out the game and lost, old fellow. What say now to the state of affairs?" demanded Worth serenely. We were on the bench by the fire with our guns gripped between our knees and enjoying our first taste of self-respect in nearly a week. Sass held a dingy corncob pipe in his toothless mouth, but a watchful and precise following of every movement of the gang with a ready rifle showed that the old

man was on the alert. He looked like an old soldier. We wondered if he had been one at some time.

No answer came from Bill to this sally, only an uneasy shifting of his body upon the hard edge of the bunk.

"What did you think, Bill?" continued Worth argumentatively, puffing out clouds of tobacco smoke in a reflective manner. "What was your little game? Did you really imagine that you could drive us out of the camp and rob us at your leisure, while we lived or died out in the woods, and you didn't care which?"

"I say, byes," said Bill, breaking his silence, "loosen up this cord on me wrists a bit. 'Tis cuttin' me arms and hurts like the divil."

"Not yet awhile," answered Worth sharply, "you didn't think we were hurt any when you sent us on a thirty mile hike in a wilderness like this without food, clothing, or arms—you, you deserve to suffer a little, and I'm glad you do."

"I'll tell ye wan thing, byes," began Bill, "'twas that little divil Jean Ba'tiste put us up to the whole job. If 'twere not for him ye could have stid here and wilcome. But he wanted yer

trap line, and he wanted yer furs and grub—so we put ye out. Ain't that the way of it, min?"

There was an answering chorus of "oui, oui," and "yes," from the rest of the crowd, accompanied by an eager leaning forward of their bodies. They were uncomfortable, there was no doubt of that; but when we remembered our long vigil of fasting and cold, our hearts were hardened. I said to them:

"Men, you leave here in the morning. Don't you ever come back. We've got this camp now and intend to keep it. No one else can use it unless we say so. Bill, that was a lie you told when you said you had permission to use the camp, wasn't it?"

"A dom lie," answered Bill, promptly. "I niver heerd of the owner of this shack in me life."

"I thought so. Now all of you can have your guns back—except you, Bill—but not any ammunition. We don't trust you. You burned up the old man's cabin, Bill, also his gun, and for that you must pay. Therefore your rifle goes to him. For the food and other things of ours which you have used or destroyed you must make

good by leaving us one of the sleds. How does that strike you all?"

"How are we to live, sure, on the trail?" whined Bill. "It's forty mile or more to the nearest Canadian sittlement."

"You shall have some food given you, enough to last till you reach that place. You can get fresh supplies there. And then remember, all of you, make a fresh start in some other direction. Don't come back here."

They received this verdict in comparatively good humor. In fact, they seemed so docile that along towards morning we loosened their bonds somewhat so that they could move their cramped arms. But we kept a wary eye on them for they outnumbered us and were sly and treacherous fellows. None of us slept that night.

In the morning we took a survey of conditions in the camp. The food supply—flour, meal and pork—which was of generous proportions when we left, was reduced to less than half its bulk by the invaders in a week. Everything was in a filthy condition—dishes, floors and beds. Our furs were untouched. In the loft were a number of fresh skins which had been taken from our traps. These we appropriated without hes-

itation and as a matter of course. Our missing otter and marten pelts were found under Bill's bunk, which was about the only place we had not examined when we made our former search. We resolved to get rid of the fellows that very morning. We lined them up outside after giving them a good breakfast. One of the sleds, loaded with their belongings, including what was left of their doubtful-looking food supply—they had not stinted themselves after they had got possession of the camp—stood at the door with a long rope attached and ready for travel. Their empty guns, except Bill's, were tied on top. Jean Ba'tiste, although weak and ill, insisted on going along with the rest and he took his place with a sullen expression beside the sled line. It did our hearts good to see them lined up for departure.

"Ready! Marchez!" sternly ordered Worth. They started forward slowly. We walked behind with loaded guns. Sass remained behind to guard the camp. Over the ice of Little Averil in steady marching formation to the dam we went, thence along the trail to Big Averil, and out on the ice there. We halted on the shore and watched the gang as they kept on up

the lake. Their receding forms grew smaller and smaller, and their talking came more faintly to our ears. They reached the further shore. There the six black specks on the snow, including the dog, disappeared in the woods.

CHAPTER XXII

THE KING OF THE MOUNTAIN

For the next two weeks we never left the camp unguarded. During the day one of us was always in the house with two of our guns ready, and the door barricaded. The broken hinges had been replaced with stiff pieces of leather strongly nailed on, and a stout log a foot through was braced against the door and rested on a thick cleat fastened to the floor. At night, for the first week, we took turns in maintaining a watch until daylight. Many lonely hours I passed in this way sitting by the blazing fire with a rifle leaning against the bench beside me. But we were not disturbed. No signs of the invaders were visible anywhere in the woods. They evidently had put straight for the Canadian settlements. There was no place nearer that we knew of where they could stay while awaiting a favorable chance to regain possession of the camp. They, of course, knew nothing of the

cave. Still, we took no chances, and were vigilant to maintain a strict watch at all times.

On the fourth day after we took the camp Worth became sick. A severe chill seized him one afternoon and he soon went to bed with a high fever, moaning and tossing all night. He was no better in the morning, complaining of his head which he said seemed ready to split. The exposure and anxiety of mind to which he had been subjected had brought on some illness which I was unable to diagnose. I attended to his wants as well as I could. I thought of the packet of medicines which his mother had given me and administered to him some strong doses of senna. Noticing that he seemed much worse in the evenings I also gave him some heavy doses of quinine during the daytime when his head did not bother him so much. This seemed to have a good effect. He began to improve soon afterwards but it was a week before he was able to sit up and again take an interest in the camp, looking very pale and thin. Sass was very solicitous about him. We shot some partridges and broiled their plump breasts for Worth's dinner. The red berries which we had gathered in the swamp were still in the camp and Sass pro-

nounced them to be real cranberries. He gathered more and made a delicious jam which we all enjoyed.

More snow came during the two weeks which we spent in the camp. The white blanket was two feet thick in the woods. Our traps were useless under such conditions as no animal could smell the bait at such a depth; at least we thought not. The deadfalls might perhaps be of some use for they stood well above the ground and the little houses would protect the trigger to some extent. During all this time we had not been over our line; but on a bright morning at the close of the second week Sass and I strapped on our snowshoes and left for Big Averil to examine the twelve miles of traps and put them in condition for business. Worth was rapidly growing stronger, but was yet too sick to undertake such a journey. We left him in charge of the camp. Surprise by our half-breed friends was possible, as they now had ample time to get to the settlements, obtain a fresh supply of ammunition, and return if they so wished. That they would do so was yet to be determined. We kept a wary eye for signs as we went up the lake and entered the woods, but saw none. We went

over the whole line that day, digging out frozen traps and resetting them under three inches of loose snow, using our fish oil liberally on both traps and our drag of skinned muskrats which left a broad mark behind us. In a deadfall we found a marten with its back broken. Deer tracks were plentiful, some of them very recent, but we did not get a shot.

Around the heavy deadfall which we had found pulled down once before we observed the tracks of some creature with big, clawed feet. The little house containing the bait was broken down and scattered in every direction. The trail led from this to the next trap which also was destroyed and the bait gone. A savage and sagacious brute was in the vicinity, that was clear. What it might be I could not conjecture, but Sass, after inspecting its work and remarking upon the formation of the creature's feet in the snow, said to me with conviction, "Dis yere bus'ness is done by an animile I ain't nebber seen but onct when I fust come to de lakes. He's de mos' desperit willain in all de woods. A fisher or a lynk is a fool to him."

"What sort of creature is it, Sass?" I inquired with considerable curiosity.

"Dis feller is like youah ahter,—he don't belong roun' here no more. De country ain't wild 'nough for him, cause he got to live whar de woods is de way dey used to be—berry thick and heavy—and whar game is plenty. Dis yere tracks was made by a carcajou or 'Injun debbil,' as some folks call him."

"A wolverine?" I exclaimed in astonishment, for I knew these animals were very rare and found only as a rule much further north.

"Yes, sir! A wolverine; dat's jes' what it is dat's been yere. An' if we had some ob dem steel traps wid us I don' know but we could fix somet'ing for him dat he would fall inter, cunnin' as he is."

"How would you do it? He seems a pretty slick animal by the way he knocks down the dead-falls and gets the bait without being caught."

"Jes' what I wants him to do. He ben yere now an' he beliebs all he has to do is to scratch and tear 'round until dese logs and stones fall down and he gits de bait easy. Now ef I had three or fo' o' dem traps, I knows I could git him sure."

"It's only about two miles or so to the ridge.

We can get the traps and bring them back in an hour or two," I said.

"Den we'll play dis feller a trick. We'll tote 'em back, an' ef dat carcajou doant wish he'd a stayed up in Canady 'fore 'nuther week is ober, den I miss my guess."

We went on to the ridge and got four large traps which we took back to the scene of operations. The animal seemed to have a regular route. His tracks led off through the woods in a direction away from the lakes after he had followed our line for half a mile; but he is a swift and tireless traveler and should we trail him they might lead us for miles up into Canada.

Sass lamented that he did not have a fresh-killed rabbit as a lure but he took partridge, just shot, and after cleaning away the snow around one of the deadfalls he placed the four steel traps in a sort of square around it, covered them lightly with snow, and sprinkled blood and feathers over all as if a killing had occurred there. The partridge itself he placed in the cuddy of the trap. Everything was smoothed away in the vicinity and our tracks covered from sight as we retreated, by brushing the snow over

them with a branch. At a little distance away there were no signs apparent of the deadly character of the place; but the "devil" is a creature which possesses almost human intelligence and Sass expressed the fear, as we went forward, that he would discover our presence in spite of all our precautions.

Over the whole length of our line on the ridge and in the valley nothing else in the way of fur signs was seen, and towards evening we reached the deadwater after a trying day. There had been considerable labor involved in getting the traps in working order again and arranging the surroundings of each satisfactorily, but when all had been accomplished we felt relieved. Our business was once more in a fair way to prosper. Beside Nulhegan Mountain I told Sass about the eagle which had been seen there and expressed a wish to get it as a specimen. Sass surprised me by saying that if I could get it he would prepare it; he had often skinned birds, he said, and would guarantee to make a fine mounting subject of this one, providing we could furnish him with some preservative for the skin. He added that several eagles lived near the lakes, two others having their eyrie on a moun-

tain near the lower end of Big Averil. I thought of the jar of arsenic which we had found in the camp and on mentioning it to the old negro he at once said nothing better could be had—all he wanted was the bird. A golden eagle, mounted properly, would bring twenty-five dollars or more in the large cities.

We found the camp tranquil on our return. Worth had spent a quiet day. There had been no signs of our enemies; they must have gone far up into their own country. No doubt they were now tending their rusty old traps in some backwoods unknown to us, a long distance off. Worth was much interested in Sass's scheme about bird mounting. There were beautiful specimens to be obtained in the woods—the great horned owl, for instance, such as we had frightened out of the camp, handsome birds, speckled brown and ash-gray in color; also the large, snowy owls, two feet long, with big, solemn eyes. These could be found dozing in some great, dark hemlock during the daytime, if we looked for them. Even the common crow, black garbed like a wildwood's undertaker, would make a nice ornament for somebody's bookcase, and would be worth money to us. This was a branch of

our trapping business which we had not thought of before. We determined to follow it up.

We saw the familiar form of the eagle hovering in the air over Nulhegan early next morning. He rarely failed to survey the swamp each day, particularly at his breakfast time; after which, unless he swooped down and struck something as he did the muskrat in our trap he would sail away towards the larger lake, generally alone, but sometimes would be accompanied by another one, perhaps his mate. We never saw him return, however. This must have occurred either late in the day, or perhaps he did not live on Nulhegan at all, coming over there in the morning on a food hunting trip. For half an hour the great bird circled slowly near the summit, then as usual directed his course for Big Averil. Nothing below evidently interested him that morning. Sass followed his flight as long as the black speck was visible in the sky.

"If we want to git dat bird we mus' git up airly in de mornin'. He hoverin' roun' de mountain top at sun-up or before dat time ebery day. Now, how do you tink we can git him?"

"The only way I can see," said I, "is for some-

one to get up to the summit before daylight and lay for him behind a ledge. He may sail in close enough for a shot. Where he hovers generally is about three hundred yards above the earth and we never could hit him from below."

"A rifle bullet might reach dat bird, but a man mus' hab a stiddy hand to hit him. Somebody got to go up dat mountain, an' if de journey was made de night before dere would be much better chance to git him."

"Cold job," I suggested, "lying there on the mountain overnight. I think if we started about two hours before daylight and took a lantern with us we could reach the top before he begins his gyrations up there."

Worth and I agreed to try this plan the next morning. A lantern was fixed up, consisting of a candle placed within a wooden framework and a piece of broken glass in front to protect it from the wind. With this contrivance and the shot gun we set out two hours before dawn and proceeded around the swamp to the further side of Nulhegan up which we began to climb among the snow-covered ledges. It was a dark and moonless morning but yet light enough for us to see at first without the lantern. There were

many dangerous places; a misstep meant a plunge below of fifty or seventy-five feet to the foot of the rocky platform, and we were glad to use our light as we got further up the mountain side.

The climb took us a full hour. As we neared the top the air became keener and we shivered despite our exertions and the warm clothing which we had donned for the occasion. The wide black dome overhead glittered with stars. There seemed to be millions of them, so thick in places that they formed milky paths across the sky. The silence reigning around was impressive; our footsteps crunching the snow and the rushing sound of the wind in the gnarled and stunted cedars being the only sounds to be heard. Near the summit we halted for a few minutes to get our breath and take a survey of our immediate surroundings. Directly above was a steep overhanging ledge which seemed to be the very top of the mountain. It evidently formed a flat table on its upper side beyond which there was nothing to be seen but a vast expanse of sky. Surmounting this we would finish our journey and greet the dawn, now very near, from the highest point of land for miles around. On the

further side of the ledge the mountain began to descend precipitously to the deadwater far below. There seemed to be only two or three rods of open space at the top forming a platform composed entirely of rock. We looked about for a way up. On one side of the ledge was a gully, rain washed, which seemed to offer the only means of getting up and we clawed our way on hands and knees along this until we stood on the bald head of Nulhegan. We were exhausted, but triumphant. No need of the lantern here. Starlight, and a faint, mysterious radiance reflected from the snowy mountain top, rendered our short passage across the rocks easy, and we slid down on the other side of the ledge out of the wind. We snuggled into a crevice a few feet wide and waited for the day.

"Anybody ever been up here before, do you think?" asked Worth. "It's a pretty steep climb even by daylight. One thing sure, nobody ever made the ascent at night before since the world began."

"Can't tell about it," I returned, "probably some of the lumber gangs have been up here in the past; or perhaps Indians. No timber worth anything here, though. If anybody ever did

come it must have been out of curiosity, I should say."

We enjoyed a quiet rest for half an hour. The air was keen as a razor at that height, but being out of the wind we did not mind it much. Soon a faint streak of light appeared on the horizon, far over Big Averil. It grew rapidly wider and extended up into the sky. The twinkling stars grew duller by degrees; we could see the country below growing more and more distinct. The two snow-covered lakes showed up plainly, surrounded by dark forests—then the camp appeared like a tiny shack stuck on the snow; and the deadwater and swamp came into view, flat and white like a vast tablecloth spread out. The red rim of the huge rising sun became visible, when a hundred feet below us there sailed slowly out from the mountain a majestic form, clothed in brown and yellow. Wide extended wings seemed big enough to cast a shadow on the earth. It was the great eagle. His eyrie was below us, doubtless, in some such crevice as we ourselves were ensconced in. His morning slow wheel round the mountain had begun.

The shotgun had been loaded the night before with a heavy charge of large shot. No bird

pellets would have made any impression on the heavy feathered form of this monarch. Worth, being the better shot, seized and cocked the gun and we stretched our bodies as far as we dared over the edge and gazed below. The eagle had already got beyond range over the swamp, not far down but well out from the mountain. Here on steady wing and in small circles he was scanning the surface of the swamp—a beautiful sight from our point of vantage. He rose slightly. Worth leveled the gun with shaking hands and took aim. But not yet had the opportunity come. He was not in range. The great bird sailed out further and then mounted higher until he was almost on a level with our position. We were afraid he would discover us, but his attention was wholly absorbed in looking for a breakfast far beneath. A slight turn brought him closer in—if he kept on he would feel the heavy charge that Worth's trembling finger would send out from the mountain top. Nearer and nearer he came; his large, hooked beak and crooked talons were plainly visible. His bright eyes roved over a whole country at once. Fifty yards in—thirty yards,—Worth's gun flashed and a deafening report made my head ring. The

eagle, struck by the leaden hail reeled in the air, his gigantic wings drooping, his proud head sinking—quick coming oblivion—down,—far down —falling slowly for an interminable time. His body at last struck the frozen swamp seven hundred feet below and there it lay still.

We watched its descent with guilty feelings. The prize for which we had come had been secured, yet, if we could have placed the eagle back on his powerful wings in the morning sunlight with the mountains and forest for his home and habitat, as they had been perhaps for more years than our combined ages would number, we would have done so gladly. But there were other eagles there—one, we believed, on that very mountain; others, certainly, off towards the larger lake. We consoled ourselves with that thought. We killed no more eagles during our stay at Averil camp.

The descent of the mountain was comparatively easy, and in half an hour we arrived at its base and picked up the dead form lying there. Its wings stretched five feet or more when fully extended, and the body and legs were large and muscular. The talons were like steel hooks. We took it back to camp. Sass had heard our

shot and was in a fever of expectancy. His delight knew no bounds when he saw us carrying our burden and he rubbed his hands gleefully as he assured us that after breakfast we should see how he would prepare such a noble skin.

When all was ready Sass got out the jar of arsenic and placed it beside him on the porch. The eagle's body lay stretched out on its back before him. With a sharp blade Sass, after carefully parting the feathers, made an incision from its breastbone down to the vent, being careful not to cut into the cavity of the body. The skin was then turned back from the flesh, the leg joints broken at the knees and the skin separated from the under side of the body. Further stripping along the back removed the skin there; the wing joints were treated in the same manner as the legs, and the skull detached from the body and the cavity cleaned. Taking the dry, powdered arsenic Sass rubbed it over every inch of the raw surface. The flesh was scraped off the leg bones which were bound round with old rope yarn; a large ball of it also was made to represent the body, and the skin was then turned back over all. It looked very lifelike. When all was

finished Sass announced that he would not trade his specimen for the best skin that we had in camp. We admired his dexterity in the matter.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WOLVERINE

On the third day after resetting our traps Worth and I started out to walk the line. It was near Christmas, but just what day of the month it was we were not sure. Time had been lost track of during our stay in camp, especially at the troublous periods of the Canuck's visit and Worth's sickness, and we could not even decide just when Sunday came in each week. We were forced to use the days much alike; but on Christmas Day, which we fixed after careful calculation to occur on the following day, we resolved to have a good dinner. This would probably consist of partridge breasts, cranberry jam, hot biscuits and tea. Our deer meat was used up; the invaders had finished off most of it during their stay. We would have to go on another hunt before long, and on our snowshoes this would not prove a difficult task.

Sass was left in charge of the camp with Bill's rifle. We carried our two guns and the axe.

Snow was two feet on the level in the woods but on the lakes where the wind had free play most of the fall had been swept to the shores leaving about three inches of brittle crust on top of the black ice. From any height overlooking the lakes they and the surrounding land were indistinguishable from each other, both presenting the same monotonous appearance of a white and dreary waste. The weather was cold; our little thermometer outside the camp registered close to zero. We reached the further shore and struck into the woods. It was doubtful if our traps would show much of a catch in that weather, but as we had placed them in very light snow and no rain had fallen to freeze them up, they might have been sprung by some animals. At any rate, our deadfalls could be depended on to work in almost any weather. Mid-winter was an off-season for trapping, as we had found.

Our line was barren of results until we reached the deadfall with the fatal surroundings which we had fixed up for the wolverine. Neither Worth nor I had ever seen one of these animals, and knew nothing about them except they were denounced and even feared by all trappers as being inveterate thieves—robbers of traps—and

were savage to a degree not equalled by any other denizens of the woods. At home in the trees or on the ground, nothing escaped their fierce pursuit once they struck the trail. Our deadfall with its battery of four big steel traps in a square presented a strange spectacle to us. The carefully balanced log weight connected with the stick and spindle had fallen and lay on the snow to one side; the little house had been demolished and the partridge bait inside had disappeared; the blood-stained snow and the loose feathers which Sass had scattered over the trap were mixed up in the wildest confusion. But there was a ready explanation of all this. One of our corner traps with its two foot clog had vanished. A broad track led off towards the back country, and a few drops of fresh blood on the snow, evidently came from some animal's wounded leg. Some large creature had been there and got caught, that was certain. We had no doubt it was the wolverine—every sign about the place showed the savageness and cunning which were attributed to this animal. We looked uneasily about, but all was quiet in the vicinity. Nothing but a broad trail made by the jumping log and the big, clawed feet of the cap-

tive gave indications of a tragic happening here at an hour not remote. We resolved to follow the tracks.

For more than a mile they led straight away through the forest. The snow retarded the animal's progress considerably, but it also prevented the clog from getting caught in obstructions on the ground. The captive had covered a good distance without being obliged to rest. We came to a thicket where the snow was trampled down in a circle. Here the animal no doubt had rested, and had paced round in a great rage. Snarls and yells must have echoed through the woods in this vicinity not long before. The trail led us about two miles further. Different spots showed halting-places, but the gripping steel trap held firm and the clog tore up long furrows in the snow. No use trying to get free, old fellow! A double spring trap on your leg is something that you can't get off unless you have a lever to pry it with; or unless you possess grit enough to chew it off, and your leg too. The wolverine has the grit—all accounts agreed as to that—but we hoped that he would not exercise it before we came up with him.

Underneath a mound of earth and rocks cov-

ered with bare bushes and fallen trees we came on a den. Into this the tracks led. We approached the spot cautiously, and halted by it. No trail led out, nor was the clog visible. Here, then, was the wolverine, or whatever animal it might be. We need go no further. We wiped the sweat off our foreheads, for our pace had been a hot one and had heated us considerably. While resting for a few moments we looked about the neighborhood—all snow, waste, tangled woods and solitude—a strange locality to us and far off our line. The mound seemed to have no opening, except the one in front, and we had a problem to solve like the one which confronted us in the case of the fisher, viz.: how to get the animal out of his stronghold. We approached as near as we dared to the opening and endeavored to see within. It was black as night inside. The mark of the clog showed plainly for two feet or so where it had been dragged in, but there it disappeared. The passage evidently extended several feet under the mass of earth. We held a consultation. It was a serious business to get at the vicious creature; and this time Sass was not present to divert

the animal and ourselves with his gymnastic exercises.

Before trying anything else I went around to one side of the mound, cleared away some of the snow and pounded on the frozen surface with the axe, hoping to start the animal out. Worth stood before the hole ready to shoot if he appeared. The heavy blows rang out on the frosty air and sent a vibration through the whole pile. We heard low, snarling whines come from the cavity, and a rustling and clanking of the chain was audible. The wolverine was very wide awake and on the watch, that was evident, and it behoved us to be somewhat careful. He was not fastened to a post as the fisher was; the trap being attached only to a clog which a strong animal such as he was could haul along at a rapid rate. If he gave a spring unexpectedly and landed on one of us his terrible claws and teeth would leave marks which would last a lifetime. Worth retreated about ten feet and stood ready, while I resumed my pounding on the mound. Whether there was a thin place just there, or my axe blows had force enough to break the solid mass and send it kiting down

I do not know. At any rate the axe disappeared suddenly in a hole and I pitched headlong on top of the den. A crevice appeared in the passageway and through this I caught sight of a short, stocky animal with long, coarse hair. A pair of glittering eyes were sighted up at me. The creature made a rush for the hole I had made but was far too large to get through, and he stood still beneath, gritting his teeth. I yelled to Worth to look out as he might bolt but he had no intention of doing this. Instead, he stood his ground boldly with his eyes fixed on the opening, seemingly ready for anything which might turn up. I could reach him with the axe but hesitated to do so, first, because it would undoubtedly injure his fur should I hit him, and secondly because I might accidently enlarge the hole so that he could spring on top of me before I could get out of his way. A thought struck me. I hurried off a short distance and got a large branch which would reach into the passageway, and with this I began poking the animal towards the entrance. The wolverine did not attempt to avoid it; he seized it with his teeth and claws and bit most viciously, trying at the same time to tear it from my grasp. Big

scratches down its sides showed how a person's body would suffer once those sharp hooks reached it. A strong blow in the body from the pole caused him to retrace his steps towards the front, and I followed this up by frantic pokings in every direction, hitting the animal repeatedly. He continued to retreat, dragging the chain and clog after him. I called out to Worth to shoot as soon as he appeared. In a few minutes I heard a report and a triumphant yell from Worth, and on running around to the front saw the creature stretched out in the entrance, obviously lifeless. A complete picture of wickedness and ferocity was the wolverine. Evil living was written large all over him. The fur, although not very valuable, is worth about the same as a fisher's, on account of its not being so common. We were glad to secure it. The task of skinning the filthy carcass was an unpleasant one as the wolverine is cousin to the skunk, with all that that implies. We got the pelt off and rolled it up in a bundle. The body was left in the woods.

We had a three mile walk back to our line, but on our snowshoes this did not seem much. These articles, certainly, are indispensable to any

traveler in a snowy country. Partridges were thick along the way; they were sluggish to rise and in their flight, owing to the cold weather. We bagged four of them by the time we reached the ridge. There we halted for lunch. Fox tracks were visible all around, leading single file off in the woods and down to the valley. We wondered why none of these got caught in the traps. Too wary, we thought. The common fox has no peer in cunning and sagacity, otherwise he would not live so long.

After a short stay on the ridge we made our way down to the valley and went along our line of ten mink traps bordering the stream. Only one mink had been caught. Deep snows and ice had caused these animals to hold up until milder weather. We left the traps undisturbed. Another fisher was secured along the ridge. This one was partly suspended on a spring pole and when we appeared had all but freed himself. He was shot and skinned on the spot. At the deadwater, towards the close of the day, we found one or two muskrats. Our barrel containing the minnows was covered with a mass of ice and had a cap of it nearly a foot thick on top. I chopped it away and broke a hole in the

barrel. Hardly a minnow was to be seen; those that were left were dead and frozen. They would not be of much use for fishing. We hoped that those which Sass had placed in the spring would stand confinement better. The spring, at least, would not freeze, surely not near the bottom where the water came in at a uniform temperature the year round.

At the foot of Nulhegan we stopped and gazed up at the scene of our exploit with the eagle. It seemed as if we could still see that great form circling about the crest, although now the creeping shadows of night were lengthening along the snow and we had never seen him except in early morning. His mate perhaps was up there. We hoped so.

Wending our way around the swamp until we were within a quarter of a mile of the camp we heard a shot. It rang out sharp and clear in the still air, seeming to come from the direction of the house. Sass was there, but we wondered what occasion there was for him to shoot at anything. He never left the camp while we were gone; that was a standing rule. Still, he might be firing at a deer, or some other animal, standing on the edge of the woods.

Hardly probable, though; they did not usually come so close to the camp. While we were speculating over this a perfect fusilade of shots was heard—six or seven guns fired at once. Faint shouts came to our ears from the same direction. We stopped in our tracks and looked at each other in apprehension; the same thought came to us both. That first shot had been Sass's, and the volley and shouting could come from only one other source—the Canucks. They were on us again!

We started on a run for the camp.

CHAPTER XXIV

A SURPRISE ATTACK

We covered the distance in a few minutes. Hoarse voices, loud and angry, and cursing volubly in French and English, came to our ears as we neared the camp. We did not wish to run into the mêlée without a definite idea of what was happening; so we paused when we got to the edge of the woods, and reconnoitered the approaches to the camp. Only the rear was visible from that point and there all was peaceful. The racket came from the front. Bill's heavy voice shouting directions, and a pounding noise of some kind, were audible. They must be endeavoring to break down the door. We had a heavy log inside provided against just such an emergency, and Sass, like a veteran, evidently had not been taken unawares. The log was in place and apparently held firmly for the pounding on the door continued without intermission. We saw that we could reach

the mill without being discovered from the front, and darted towards it. Here we had a view round one corner of the camp, taking in the porch and the entire front of the house, and a thrilling spectacle met our eyes. Nothing more or less than a battle was in progress. Grouped before the door were all the half-breeds, with Bill's towering form in the lead wielding a log-end. He was battering in the door which was already splintered and tottering on its hinges, ready to fall. We saw Jean Ba'tiste and all the others who had been at the camp, together with a couple of strangers—husky brutes—standing beside them. They all had guns with which they were covering the door and windows. We wondered why Sass did not fire again, but soon saw that the attackers were warily keeping out of range of the window. This was the only point from which Sass could shoot until the door fell. The colored man was inside, no doubt, with his rifle ready. When the Canucks rushed him it would speak to some purpose, we knew. The old man was brave as a lion—as we had discovered in our recent fight.

"Surrinder, ye—spalpeens!" we heard Bill roar; "or we'll mur-r-der the lot o' ye. Let us

in, ye divils, or we'll burn yez like rats in a thrap."

A chorus of whoops rose from the gang. Jean Ba'tiste's voice rose above the rest uttering a volley of "sacres," and he yelled out, "Ze Eenglish cochons weel fin' out now what eet is to crack ze skull of a French gentilhomme. Sacre bleu! I feel eet yet. Tam ze villains! Let us in zere for one meenut; only one meenut weel do for me."

We had with us two loaded guns—the rifle and shotgun. The odds against us were seven to three in men and weapons, counting Sass, who would be heard from in a few watch-tickings, we thought. What had we better do? To rush out and charge them, firing as we ran, would result in disabling two of them, perhaps, leaving five men with loaded guns to oppose our advance. We would be shot down before we had gone ten yards. But if we were going to act it must be done quickly. The door hung loose; two or three more blows would send it tumbling inward. The Canucks, once getting a foothold inside, could not be dislodged. Sass would not be able to stand off such a crowd. We might as well give up the camp now, if we

did not do something, and turn our faces towards home as we did before—this time for good, as the Canucks would hold the place securely, beyond a doubt. Sass would be killed where he was in the rush, or badly wounded, for the gang was desperate, and in deadly earnest. Their bold attack showed that. Revenge and loot for all of them lay within. We must decide, and act quickly. We did so.

"Fire at them!" whispered Worth with white lips, "but don't kill any of them if you can help it."

We stepped out a foot or two from the side of the mill and leveled our guns. The Canucks did not see us, being too busy watching the door and window. I aimed my rifle at Bill's leg—I could have shot him through the body just as easily—and fired. The clear, sharp report was echoed by Worth's gun, and both Bill and Jean Ba'tiste dropped on the porch. They were hit. The rest of the crowd gave a yell of surprise and terror and turned their faces towards us. We reloaded rapidly, running behind the mill to do it; and as we did so we heard the reports of their guns. They had fired a volley at us, but the missiles struck against the side of

the building and did us no harm. Then came a shot from the window as Sass poked his gun through the pane, shattering the glass into a hundred pieces. We heard his voice cheering us on.

"Gib it to 'em, men. Cuss the scoun'rels, we'll drive 'em into de lake! Lemme git outside."

Sass appeared at the door with uplifted gun-butt. We had finished reloading by this time, and wild with excitement, caring little for wounds, or even death, we dashed forward, yelling and ready to shoot again. But the Canucks did not wait for us. With frightened shouts they rushed for the woods. We were glad to see them go and thus get rid of them. We let them run unmolested. They reached the border of trees and without pausing to look around dashed among them out of sight. We reached the porch safely, and exchanged a hearty handshake with Sass. Bill and Jean Ba'tiste lay groaning by the door, the former with a bullet hole through his thigh. His trouser leg was wet with blood just above the knee. Luckily for him, however, the bone seemed not to have been broken, for he could sit up somewhat stiffly, with his back against the house. The other remained

upon his stomach, suffering and apparently not able to move. When I attempted to turn him over he howled with anguish and begged me to let him alone. He could not bear to rest his weight on the back part of his body. On examining the wound I found that Worth's charge of shot had penetrated the fleshy portion of his anatomy, just under the edge of his heavy coat. A more distressed Canuck could not be imagined than he was. He was not dangerously hurt, but was most uncomfortable in any position except on his stomach or knees. We carried both of them indoors as we were afraid to remain exposed to a volley from the woods, should the Canucks regain their courage and return. The door was barricaded as well as possible by piling all our largest chunks of wood against it, and Sass took his station by the window to watch. A good fire was burning in the stove, and the camp was warm and comfortable.

We got the two wounded men undressed and washed their wounds carefully. Bill's leg had a little hole completely through it; but not much blood showing or pain bothering him. He seemed to be quite cheerful. We got him into a bunk where he lay quiet. With Jean Ba'tiste

it was different. Worth and I spent half an hour extracting leaden pellets from his flesh with a penknife, and each jab was the signal for a string of French oaths and loud yells. When we had finished the disagreeable job we were glad to get rid of him by making a soft place in a bunk and laying him there, where he spent the night weeping and calling on his various saints for relief. There were about thirty shot holes in his skin. Sass then told of the surprise by the Canucks.

"I seed dem fellers—seben of dem—comin' ober de ice 'long towards night wid dere sleds. Dey must hab picked up two more men in de settlements. Dey was a-skinnin' long shore, and comin' mighty wary an' slow. Dey didn't see nobody so I s'pose dey thought all ob us was away. Den dey made a rush an' got to de door. I was a-watchin' pretty close, an' when I sees Bill pick up a log and make for de door to butt it in, I jes' fired mah gun ober his head. He yelled, an' de rest ob dem all crowded 'way from dat window mighty quick. Den Bill began a poundin' an' I loaded mah gun again quick. If dey had got in dey'd been one or two dead Canucks in de passageway, for sho'."

"How was that, Bill?" called out Worth. "Did you think nobody was around when you reached the camp?"

A surly grunt came from the giant. The Frenchman was listening, too, it seemed, for he now interrupted his prayers long enough to say, "Beel say, 'attacque ze house, mes enfans. Ze Yenkees all be gone. Now is ze time to get hunk wiz zem, as you call eet.' But mon Dieu, eet is not so. Sacre nom, how I do suffaire."

"You will be better in a day or two, don't worry," replied Worth with a wink at us. "Your wounds are only skin deep."

"Skeen deep!" echoed Jean Ba'tiste, with a groan of anguish. "Zey seem a mile deep to me. Sainte Mere, peety me!"

"Shut up your parley voo head," growled Bill savagely. "I got a hole in me leg that's worse than all thim little tickles ye got in your hide. Kape quiet, now, ye French jackanapes."

A moan was the only response to this. "Say, Bill," again called out Worth from the front room, "where have your men gone now? Are they likely to come back here to-night?"

"They'll not be back, me bye, you may depind on that," responded Bill grimly. "Two men

shot is enough for the likes o' thim. They won't come within a mile o' this place any more, for love or money."

"What were you doing round here again, anyway?" I asked Bill. "I thought you were going to the settlements and then into the backwoods somewheres to the north."

"We wint to the sittlemints and got ammunition and grub all right, but we knew a better place than the backwoods to go to. There's a stretch o' country byant West Stewartstown where there's good trappin' to be found yet, and that's where we were bound for when we were going down the lake. Divil take me, I wisht I'd never seen this old camp anyway. Nothing but trouble and wounds and tribulations entirely." Here the big fellow broke down and wept. The pain and worry over his leg, combined with the unexpected disruption of all his plans for the second time, caused the fellow to weaken. We were surprised at the man's misery.

"Bill," said Worth gravely, after a pause; "you know, old man, that right and justice will always prevail in the long run. You had the upper hand here once, but see how you were driven out like a whipped cur at last. And Jean

Ba'tiste likewise. He went away from here before with a broken head, and this time you both might have been killed. If you had killed someone else here as you threatened to do, your conscience would have bothered you to the end of your days. I don't think you are a bad fellow at heart, only rough and thoughtless, and not considerate enough of the rights of others."

Bill sniveled for a few minutes and then said in a stronger and more manly voice, "Byes, I'm through wid dis thrick for ever an' aye. No more throuble for you here this winter or any other winter. When me leg allows me to travel, an' Jean Ba'tiste here is able to move his sieve of a body, we'll put for the woods beyant West Stewartstown miles and miles from here, and bother ye no more. What say to that, ye Frinch divil?"

"You speak like ze old priest, mon ami, Beel. I go,—an' I not veesit dees camp again. Ze brave garcons here may live in peace. I, Jean Ba'tiste Lapierre, say it from ze bottom of mon cœur."

We went in and shook hands with these worthy repentants. They seemed genuinely affected and sincere in their friendly talk. We hoped

that they would keep to their word, for we had experienced quite enough sorrow and fear on their account. We had no wish to further detain them, or to visit more punishment on the gang. If they would only go away somewhere and mind their own business for the future we would be very glad to let them do so, and would feel safer and happier than we had done for a long time.

We asked Bill where the others were now, and if he thought he could join them without trouble. He replied that the Canucks had left their sleds on the lake shore when they attacked the camp, and would no doubt regain possession of them and go to the foot of Big Averil, where they would halt for a while until they heard from him and Jean Ba'tiste. It would be several days before either of them could travel, but he thought he would be able to get word to them in some way before that time. I volunteered to go down the lake and find them, but he said it would not do as it might be dangerous. They did not know how matters stood and might shoot me, thinking I had come on a hostile errand.

As a matter of fact it took a week for their wounds to heal properly, and Bill was unable

to leave the camp before that time. His leg was a little stiff when he tried to walk, but he said it was only a little muscle-bound, and would be all right in a few days. Jean Ba'tiste still took his meals standing, but when he left he was full of gratitude for our treatment of him, uttering voluble protestations of undying friendship for all of us. He shook our hands repeatedly. Then they departed over the ice on Little Averil and soon were lost to sight at the dam. We hoped they would find their companions promptly, which they seemed confident of doing. Some two or three hours after they had gone we heard a familiar volley of shots far down towards the foot of the large lake. At the sound we looked at each other and smiled. All the birds had flocked together again, but we did not fear them now. Bill and our other guest were too sincere in their talk for us to doubt their intentions any longer. Still, barricades at night and camp guard by day were our rules of living. We had learned caution in the woods.

CHAPTER XXV

OLD AND NEW FRIENDS

Christmas had come and gone. Our conjecture as to the proper day had been confirmed by Bill. We had been too busy and too much worried to observe the day in the way we had wished, but now New Year's day was at hand and we could celebrate that instead. To do so in proper American fashion we must have a good dinner. Materials for this in the camp were now lacking. Meat we had none; our flour and pork supply was very low, and a deer must be run down and killed if we wished to replenish our larder and put ourselves in a position to enjoy a bountiful repast. We started early to find fresh tracks and follow them to the death. We struck a trail in the snow near the camp, and an all day hunt on snowshoes brought us on the deer. He was shot and killed without difficulty and his carcass brought back after a weary tramp of several miles. Sass, meanwhile, had prepared a large

supply of cranberry jam, and with these we felt prepared to enjoy the day in a fitting manner.

January first dawned cold and clear. Snow which had fallen weeks before still lay on the ground, and on top of this additional storms had made a covering to a depth of three feet or more in places which were exposed to a drifting wind. A bleak and wintry landscape it was—ice and snow everywhere one looked—lake, forest and mountain all buried in a cold and deathlike slumber.

Our dinner passed off pleasantly, being both plentiful and appetizing, if somewhat limited in the number of dishes. Late in the afternoon, we heard a noise outside which caused us to start up in amazement and hurry to look out. It was a sound remarkably like the slow plodding footsteps of a horse, and in addition we heard the sound of feminine voices engaged in conversation. Out on the porch bareheaded we ran and round the corner of the house to where we could look up the timber road. There we saw the cause of the commotion. A sleigh filled with people, and drawn by a tired horse, was coming slowly along the road towards the camp. Worth uttered a shout and waved his hand to someone

in the sleigh whom he recognized. I looked closer. It was the little school-teacher. She laughed and waved her hand in a friendly manner. Beside her in the back seat was another lady, somewhat older, who was looking about her with interest, and on the driver's seat was a tallish man bundled up in a fur coat, and with huge gauntlets of the same material on his hands. When the sleigh had drawn near to the house the school-teacher called out, "How do you do. I see you are all alive yet."

"Yes, alive and hearty," responded Worth. "This is a great and unexpected pleasure, lady, to see you here so far in the woods."

"Thank you. This is your landlord," continued she, indicating the driver, "Mr. Butterfield and his wife from Burlington."

"How are you, young men," said the tall man pleasantly. "We heard you were living in the camp and thought we would come and stay with you for a day or two. I have some business to attend to around here which will take me about that time to dispose of. I hope we will not disturb you."

"Not at all," responded Worth. "Plenty of room, so far as we are concerned."

The little school-teacher introduced us in proper form to Mrs. Butterfield, and we in turn presented to them, Sass, who stood respectfully in the background. His old gray head and wrinkled face seemed to make a favorable impression on our visitors. They entered the house and the two women gave delighted exclamations as the clean and warm quarters met their view. Sass hustled round like a regular camp cook to get a good meal ready, while we assisted Mr. Butterfield to put the horse, well blanketed, in the old stable. A liberal supply of oats, which was taken from the back of the sleigh, was given to him. From the same receptacle came a pleasant surprise for us in the shape of a five-pound crock of butter and a small bag of potatoes,—gifts from our visitors. We were much gratified to receive these.

The ladies had taken possession of the bunk room, which was partitioned off from the living room by a lap robe curtain. Around the dinner table that evening we were a merry company. Sass waited on us and did it well, too. Mr. Butterfield stated that he had come to inspect the standing timber on the tract which he owned around both lakes, as he had a chance to sell the

spruce to a lumber company which would begin cutting the next fall. He would like to make the round of the lakes the next morning and asked if we had anything special to do that day, as he would be glad of our company. We promised to go with him. He was curious about Sass, and asked how he came to be living with us. On hearing that he was a cook he thought that, perhaps, he could get work for him at the camp which would be established there the following season. This would be a good thing for the old man, who was getting too feeble to trap any longer for a living. We recounted our adventures with the Canuck half-breeds. Mr. Butterfield expressed great indignation at their behavior, and stated that he had never heard of them before, nor had he given them permission to use the camp. He wondered why we hadn't shot some of them.

We slept that night by the fire. The two ladies occupied the bunk room, which had been carefully bedded with soft bough tips and covered with well-aired blankets. In the morning they declared that they had enjoyed a delightful night's rest. Mr. Butterfield wished to go around Big Averil first to estimate his trees there

as to their size and value. He had a pair of snowshoes with him, and took his rifle along in the hope of getting a shot at something. We made a circuit of the lake well back in the woods, where numerous memoranda were made, thence around Little Averil. The journey took up most of the forenoon. Worth and I had been conferring privately during the morning about informing our host of the existence of the marble deposit. We concluded that there would never be a better time than now, when the man whom we counted on to negotiate the business was on the ground. Therefore, during dinner, Worth, clearing his throat, began:

"Mr. Butterfield, has this country ever been prospected for anything else besides timber,—minerals, or quarries of valuable building stone, anything in those lines?"

"Not to my knowledge," replied the lumberman promptly. "I have never heard of any discoveries of that kind being made here. Still, mines may exist in these mountains—iron, graphite, or even coal, for all I know."

"Will you kindly tell us just how far back of Little Averil you own; also up the valley which we crossed this morning."

"About three miles, I think. The company I am interested in acquired this land years ago. Beyond that distance the timber lands are controlled by a lumber company in Bennington, if I am not mistaken."

Worth looked at me inquiringly. Our new friend, then, did not own the site of our quarry. But he could help us; he knew the real owners of the tract; and if we could interest him in the scheme of acquiring it by purchase or control before the news of the presence of the marble became public, we should do as well, perhaps better, by allowing him to put the business through for us. The valuable stone was ours by right of discovery. Many years had elapsed since the country had been first settled; many more might pass before the deposit in that wild place was found. We felt that we were entitled to the reward. I gave a sign to Worth to proceed. Both Mrs. Butterfield and the school-teacher were very much interested in our talk, and sat regarding us with expectant eyes. Sass hung open-mouthed over the back of Mr. Butterfield's chair.

"The reason I have asked these questions," continued Worth, "is that my partner and myself have found, or believe we have found, a

valuable marble deposit some four miles from camp. It is situated up the valley of which I have spoken. If it proves to be of large value we think we are entitled, as its discoverers, to a part of the returns from it, and we would like to have your advice how to proceed in the matter."

"Four miles from the camp," mused Mr. Butterfield, leaning back on the bench; "that would bring it in the territory of the Bennington company. What reason have you for thinking it is of value?"

Worth told him of his knowledge of the different forms of marble, which he had acquired during his studies at the academy, and ended by describing the appearance of the cave. This interested Mr. Butterfield greatly.

"Can you reach the cave conveniently from here?" he asked.

"Very easily. We could go there in an hour or so this afternoon, if you are not too tired," I suggested.

"Let us go, then. If what you say regarding it is true there may be some profit in it for all of us."

We donned our snowshoes at once and took

our way around the deadwater and thence straight up the valley. Arriving at the base of the ridge, opposite the cave, we asked Mr. Butterfield if he saw any signs of an extensive bed of marble being near and he declared, after a long survey, that he saw nothing at all resembling it. We then directed his attention to the small black opening on the hillside as being the entrance to the cave, and we went up to it. Our visitor regarded the place doubtfully, but on seeing us stoop and crawl in, he dropped on his knees and followed us. We reached the chamber, and were pleased to observe Mr. Butterfield's astonishment as he emerged from the passage and gazed about him. The place was just as we had left it on the night we set out for our desperate raid on the Canucks. Black embers covered the floor where our fire had been, and our bough bed had withered away in a corner.

The smooth and beautifully marked walls and ceiling were carefully examined by Mr. Butterfield, and much admired; and on our leaving the cave and going over the whole hillside, tracing as well as we could the extent of the deposit, he became enthusiastic over the matter.

"Now, young men," he said as we journeyed

homeward, "I believe that there is a large and valuable bed of marble in that hill. When I get back to Burlington I will have a properly qualified expert come here and look over the ground, early in the Spring, when the country can be thoroughly examined. If things are favorable, I will then try to interest the right parties in the matter and obtain a price on this whole section. We will buy it up, if possible. If we are successful in that, you can rest assured that each of you will share equally with myself in the profits of the transaction. I will give you a written memorandum to that effect before I leave."

This speech caused us to shake hands with him warmly. Aside from his personality, which was honest and above board, he had been vouched for by the little school-teacher, and in her we knew we had a firm friend.

Our guests intended to leave for home early the next day. It required nearly all of one day to make the journey, even with a good horse and sleigh, but their journey was deferred for another day when Sass, in speaking to Mr. Butterfield, declared he had some live minnows in

the spring hole and hoped to get over to Wallis Pond before long to get some fish.

"What! Pickerel fishing? Nothing I like better," exclaimed the lumberman. "Mary, what do you say to our stopping another day in camp? Our young friends, I am sure, would not object, and perhaps we can all go and have some sport through the ice to-morrow."

The two ladies did not care to fish, but expressed their willingness to remain in camp another day. Sass went over to the site of his former home and brought back a pail of lively minnows—all that were left in the hole, he said. We were to start on snowshoes for Wallis Pond early the following morning. The old colored man was to remain in camp and have a warm meal ready for us on our return.

CHAPTER XXVI

WALLIS POND

We left the camp early the next morning to fish through the ice for pickerel. Sass declared that the pond was shallow and full of big fish. We took along the pail of minnows; also the axe to chop holes in the ice with, and a number of short lengths of line with big hooks. Our tip-ups had been whittled out of splints on the night before. They consisted of a long and short stick crossed at right angles and tied together close to one end of the longer one. The long stick was provided with a gay little flag of red calico tied to one end. This would serve as a signal when a fish was caught. The journey occupied two hours, as the pond was about five miles to the northward, beyond Big Averil. It was not nearly so fine a body of water as the two lakes which we were acquainted with, yet it presented a picturesque scene lying in a bowl among the hills and shrouded in snow and ice. Our task of chopping holes was a difficult one;

fifteen inches of ice had formed so far during the winter and to get through this required at least twenty minutes' labor for each one. We dug nine of them, and baited our lines with the sluggish minnows, which we lowered into the black water. They grew more lively as the warmer temperature below thawed them out and swam about in a lively fashion. We had no results for half an hour; no fish seemed to be around. Then one of Worth's tip-ups showed a red flag fluttering in the wind. Running over, Worth jerked out a pickerel of two pounds' weight. I followed soon after with another one and Mr. Butterfield in a few minutes threw out on the ice a fish that would weigh at least four pounds. The sport for two or three hours was good, though no very large pickerel were taken. We had secured a dozen when a tip-up in front of Mr. Butterfield was pulled over with a jerk, and the short cross-piece cracked under the strain. By a quick movement, Mr. Butterfield had secured the end of the line before it went out of sight in the water, and held on to it for dear life. His arm was drawn slowly to the edge of the ice and then dragged from side to side as the big fish surged about.

"Gracious, boys!" he shouted, "I've got a regular whopper here. He must be a monster by the way he pulls."

"Don't lose him," yelled Worth. "Let him struggle a while; he will soon tire."

But it was ten minutes before Mr. Butterfield dared put a strain on the line, and then he slowly drew to the surface a pickerel with a head as big as a bull-dog's. It looked like a muskalonge but Mr. Butterfield said that the latter were not found here. The fish proved to be a tremendous lake pickerel, and weighed close to seven pounds. This was the largest fish that was caught during our stay at the Averil Lakes. By late afternoon we had secured twenty-four pickerel, or enough to last us for a long time. They would keep indefinitely in a frozen state hung up in the mill.

We looked around the shores of the pond with an eye to its trapping possibilities. It appeared wild and promising to us—a new country so far as we were concerned, for we had never been far from camp in this direction. The usual tracks had been encountered on the way there—deer, marten, raccoon—and one or two others which we could not distinguish. Fox tracks, a week

or two old, ran directly across the lake. They had been made while the snow was soft and then frozen into the ice. Mr. Butterfield said that this pond was a great place for deer in the summer, the water being shallow, and many plants that deer loved grew along its shores. The only moose that he had ever seen was observed feeding in one of its coves years before. The animals had now become very scarce. Only the wildest and most inaccessible places in Maine and Canada harbored them, yet there had been a time when they were plentiful here. Indiscriminate shooting, and a naturally timid disposition on their part, had driven them off.

"Where are the Canucks; they must be over in this direction?" said Worth suddenly. "The gang have left no tracks on or around this pond, though. There are seven in the crowd, and they must make a trail like a stage coach wherever they roam about."

"If they said they were going towards West Stewartstown then they are many miles from here," remarked Mr. Butterfield. "That hamlet lies about ten miles northeast from the foot of Big Averil, I believe, and the Canucks are probably in the woods between there and the lake.

I hope you won't have any more trouble with them."

"I don't think we shall," I said; "they tried twice to oust us from the camp and failed, so I think they've got enough. Besides, we treated the two wounded men well while they were with us. Even rough fellows like them must have a spark of gratitude for kindnesses shown them."

"How about our kindness in shooting them?" inquired Worth. "Think they're grateful for that?"

"That was nothing but what they expected. It was all in the game. They fired at us, too, if you remember."

"I remember it," replied Worth grimly; "I'm not likely to forget that part for a while, I assure you."

"This pond," again remarked Mr. Butterfield, "is one of the best perch fishing places to be found anywhere. Our sawgang boss and myself came here one summer afternoon some years ago. We launched an old boat which we found on the shore, located a hole over on the north side of the pond, and in two hour's fishing yanked out seventy lively little perch. They acted just like small trout,—ran with the bait,

and when pulled out endeavored to shake themselves free, just like game fish. They are a mighty good pan fish, too. Some people like to eat bull-heads," he continued as we gathered our pickerel off the ice, strung them on long withes, and prepared to start for home. "They are found here, too. An old farm woman once told me that she preferred them to any fish that came from the water, not even excepting trout."

"Bull-pouts are very good eating," affirmed Worth. "No bones to bother with, and sweet flavored meat. They don't look very prepossessing with their black skins and horns, but looks don't always count in this world."

"Not by a long shot," said Mr. Butterfield, decidedly. "If I were you, boys, I'd run a line of traps around the shores of this pond. Mink and marten ought to be plentiful here; and when the snow goes off a little in the spring, the animals will be more lively, mink especially. You know they burrow down in their holes under heavy snow and remain there for a long time during the winter. They reappear some time in February, usually."

"I didn't know that," said Worth, "I thought they were active foragers all winter."

"No. Their food consists mostly of fish, and thick ice is a great handicap to them in getting under the brooks. They travel a good ways sometimes along the banks and around the shores of lakes and ponds."

We were ready to go by this time and made our way across the ice and over the two miles that separated us from Big Averil and by sundown reached the camp. We were half frozen. Sass fried us some pickerel for supper, the rest being strung up in the mill. They presented a queer appearance—stiff as boards, and curled up in a grotesque manner. The day had passed quietly at the camp. The two women and Sass had struck up quite a friendship. The southern training of the old negro had rendered him courtly and refined in the presence of ladies, and his gentle speech and manners had quite won their hearts.

That evening Mr. Butterfield drew up and signed a memorandum regarding the marble on the ridge, agreeing to have the same prospected, and if found to be a paying proposition, to form a company and buy it if possible. We were to share equally in all profits accruing from the working of the quarry. This was satisfactory

to us. By ourselves we could do nothing; we were not business men and moreover, had no definite knowledge how to proceed. It required a man with influence and capital to put such a deal through, and Mr. Butterfield possessed both.

Early the following day the horse and sleigh were brought round to the door and the ladies seated themselves in the comfortable conveyance, snugly wrapped in furs. The little school-teacher's rosy face was downcast, and her bright eyes were fixed on us with much concern.

"Be sure to stop and see me when you come out of the woods in the spring," she said earnestly. "I want very much to know how you succeed. You have done well so far, and I hope you will continue to do so, and keep in good health."

We thanked her and promised to stop at the farmhouse without fail on our return.

"How is the road, Mr. Butterfield?" I inquired, as I took the blanket off the horse and wrapped it around the lumberman's legs. "Pretty rough going, isn't it?"

"It isn't so bad in the woods. The snow hasn't drifted much there except in exposed

places, and we can go around those and strike into the trail again, further on. There's more snow here than there is nearer to the settlements, by far. Much damper round these lakes than elsewhere, you know; and I guess these mountains have something to do with it, also."

We were sorry to see our guests depart. Their stay had been a welcome interruption of our monotonous life, and we would miss them greatly. Poor old Sass had tears in his eyes as he watched the sleigh disappear in the woods; he wiped them away with his hand.

"Gawd bless dem ladies," he said fervently. "I declar, I ain't had such a pleasant time in mah life afore. I hopes dey come here again."

We hoped so too, but they never revisited the camp.

CHAPTER XXVII

JORDAN BROOK

For a few days after the departure of our guests we hung around the camp doing little or nothing. More snow came; it seemed as if it would never stop falling. Every three or four days a storm would come on, and winter in all its dreary aspects would settle over the region. Then a bright, cold sun and keen northwest wind would make life outdoors a trial to us. During early January the temperature dropped to twenty below. But it did not affect us much. We were warmly clad; heavy fur muffs protected our ears, and thick woolen stockings our feet. Sass had a sick spell at this time. The extreme cold was bad for his feeble frame. No African can stand the cold like a white man. If he had not been with us where he could receive attention and be kept warm, I believe he would have died. We went over our line several times during this month, but furs were scarce. We got

four martens and a lynx in three weeks' trapping. Other animals were seldom seen.

Towards the close of the month Sass was strong and well again. He seemed in better health than before, and declared cheerfully that the weather soon would break, and trapping be good again. We had not much to occupy ourselves with; hunting was poor, and fishing through two feet of ice was more laborious than pleasant or profitable. At breakfast, one morning, Sass leaned back on the bench, eyeing us in a reflective manner, and then unbosomed himself as follows:

"I hab somet'ing to tell you, gem'men. I'd a tole you 'fore dis, but you been busy 'long yo' trap line and huntin' round, an' I thought I'd wait till times got dull. Dey's dull now. You men remember I spoke to you long time ago 'bout Jordan Brook?"

We remembered it, and asked him if it was the stream which flowed through the valley. He said it was. "But dey's more to dat stream dan you think for. Dere's a dam at de head ob it, an' a pond at de head o' dat. What causes dat dam dere, men?"

We looked at him inquiringly. He chuckled

with satisfaction. Like all negroes he loved to mystify people, especially white persons. It showed superiority on his part. After a pause he continued: "You got marten skins; you got minks. You hab also fisher an' lynk. Den dere's de squirrels—nice gray li'l fellers; an' de wolverine too, I don't forgit him. But dere's one kind ob fur dat you habn't got yit, an' it's one ob de best, too. I think we git some ob dat kind, ef you gem'men mighter walk ten miles on yo' snowshoes."

"What kind of fur, Sass?" I asked. "Is it to be found along Jordan Brook?"

"Not in de brook, but in de pond at de head ob it. Men, dere's beaver dere, and dey hab built as fine a dam as ebber you see on dat brook."

"Beaver!" we both exclaimed incredulously. "They are as scarce as hen's teeth in this country."

"Dey is sca'ce. But las' winter I saw five beaver houses roun' dat pond, and dat means dat more'n twenty beavers is a livin' dere."

"Four to a house? Is that the usual number found in them?" we asked.

"Fo' or five in each house. Dat's what you all can expec'. We kin trap 'em easy, too; but

we gotter do it right or we will nebber git one ob dem."

"How are they trapped, Sass?" asked Worth. But the negro would not tell. He preferred to mystify us a little longer. He assured us, however, that if we left it to him we could be sure of adding a number of valuable skins to our store. It was agreed that we should undertake the journey, with Sass as guide. We no longer had any fear of attack from the half-breeds, and now lived much as we had done on our first coming to the camp. The colored man had made for himself another pair of snowshoes out of deer thongs and hickory strips and could outwalk us on them, as he proved on numerous occasions, old as he was. We obtained from our line along the ridge five of the largest steel traps —double spring affairs—which the negro declared were just the right size. With these and the axe the old man announced himself ready to set out. We asked him what he was going to use as bait. He said that no bait was necessary. He had a scheme that would catch beaver every time, if there were any within half a mile of the traps. So we started one bright morning, and struck into the valley following along

the brook for several miles. We secured some partridges on the way; these never failed us. A man need not starve if he can shoot or snare these birds in the wilds. Ice covered the brook from sight, and formed fantastic shapes in places where little falls had thrown the water outward. Underneath these we could hear the brook gurgling and running on its way. It probably never froze so hard that the stream was wholly stopped. As we ascended the valley the brook became wider, but no pond was yet in sight. The floor of the valley was narrow and flat—a good place for a dam. When we had gone seven or eight miles up a part of the valley strange to us, Sass said we were near the beaver houses.

We heard ahead of us the noise of falling water, an unusual sound in that icebound wilderness.

"That must be the dam ahead there, Sass," called Worth.

"Dat's what it is. We'll see it in a minute." And soon there appeared a long, low mass of bushy limbs of trees, and sticks, extending across the course of the brook. A thin stream of water was falling over this in one place behind a heavy

screen of ice. On reaching the place we clambered up the sides and stood on top of the dam. Before us was spread a noble beaver pond about one-quarter mile long, shallow, and covered with ice over its whole extent. The upper side of the dam was smoothed with clay frozen solid. A charge of dynamite would have been required to start it from its foundations in such weather. Of beavers none could be seen; but round the shores we counted five houses built close to the banks, composed of piles of sticks and earth. It was a novel sight to us and a rare one in that part of the country. One has to go far to find beavers at work nowadays.

Along shore, freshly cut chips were visible at the base of trees, and some of the trees themselves had been felled, probably during the fall and the early part of the winter. Not an open space showed on the surface of the pond and we asked Sass where the beaver were now.

"Under de ice. Dey're a livin' below now until de ice breaks up in de spring. Ef a thaw comes de ice may git loose along de dam an' de shore, an' den you will see de animiles 'fore spring comes."

"I don't see how you're going to trap them

through the ice," observed I, looking about the frozen pond.

Sass chuckled. "Ef dis pond was free ob ice I could show you a way to git beaver that nebber failed me yit. But it can't be done now; we must wait until dere is open water. But dere's anudder way to git 'em and dat's what I'm gwine to try now."

We watched the old fellow with much interest.

"Fust t'ing to do is to git dese yere traps whar de beavers kin fin' 'em. To do dat we mus' cut holes in de ice along de banks. Now, beaver has got to feed in winter same as dey do at any udder time. Consequently, we fix a dinner for dem—and set our traps at de same time."

"But I thought you said that you required no bait, Sass," I remarked.

"I wouldn't need no bait, as I tole yo', nor nothin' else but de traps ef dere was only some big holes in de pond, an' ah'll show you dat way of ketchin' 'em 'fore de winter is ober. We must do a little different now. Does you see any green willows round dis yere pond?"

We looked around the shores. We saw some young willows, but they were not green. We

went over to them and found that the rind, or bark, was fresh and tender, notwithstanding the severe winter. Sass peeled some of it off and declared that it would do in default of better. We chopped several branches and carried them back to the vicinity of the houses. Near them also, close to the banks, Sass chopped several holes in the ice, each about four feet in diameter and got the ice out on shore. The black water within looked quiet and unnatural within its frozen borders. It was about three feet deep. Taking one of the willow branches Sass stuck it down in the pond in a slanting position, with the upper end jammed into the bank under water, where it held firmly. He drove a sliding pole into the bank along side of the willow, and slipped the chain ring over it. Underneath the two he placed a trap close under the bank resting on the mud bottom.

"Now we're ready for ole Mr. Beaver to come an' git his dinner. Understan' de filos'phy ob dis contrivance, gem'men?"

We thought we did but Sass explained matters further.

"De beavers hab a way ob swimmin' roun' de pond under de ice. Dey lookin' for food. One

ob dem comes across dis fresh branch an' he say—ah, ha! here's some berry nice grub for me. He tries to drag de willow away to his house, an' in workin' roun' de hole,—kerbing!—de trap is sprung, wid his hind leg in it. He dives foı deep water, but de slidin' pole doan't let him up agin. He drowns right dere."

We listened, and almost saw the end of the beaver whose fate he described so vividly.

"Dere's anudder thing 'bout beavers, too. Dey got to be catched each one by hisself. Ef de udder animiles gets a notion dat dere's some-t'ing wrong 'bout the pond and it gettin' dangerous yere, dey'll all go away de fust chance dey git."

"You can't lay for them and shoot them in the water for that reason, I suppose," queried Worth.

"Partly for dat reason. Anudder reason is dat a beaver shot in de water will sho'ly sink like a stone. You can't git him out widout a lot ob trouble, and you'll suttinly scare ebery creature in de pond, if you do."

"You spoke about another way of getting beaver without bait," I said. "How is that done?"

"Dat way is de surest an' best manner ob takin' beaver. When dere's a good head ob water falling ober de dam, take yo' axe and walk along it. Smash out a place where de water kin pour out ob de pond quick an' fast. Set yo' trap right dar under de break in de dam an' fasten it to a couple ob stakes driven into the mud."

"What happens then?"

"As soon as de beavers see de pond a fallin' dey swim to de dam. Dey see de break and start right away to close up de hole with branches and sticks. One of dem is almos' sure to step in de trap. He drowns hisself swimmin' round de stakes, tryin' to git free."

"Very cute," commented Worth. "Beavers don't have any show when you're around, Sass."

"I nebber caught de last beaver in a pond yit, nor de last mink on a brook. I know better dan dat. I ain't no Injun, nor no half-breed neider."

Sass appeared to be a little offended at our apparent lack of confidence in his trapping honesty, but we soon appeased his wounded dignity. We left all our traps arranged as Sass had fixed the first one, and departed from the pond towards the camp. In walking our line in the fu-

ture our route would be extended to take in Jordan Brook.

We found the camp safe with nothing disturbed on our return. This was the first occasion on which we had not left a guard all day while away. The weeks which had elapsed since our unwelcome visitors had gone rendered their return, except in a friendly spirit, extremely improbable, and from this time on we came and went regardless of the raiders. We discussed moving our trap line that night. The ridge had been well raked over for fur and we felt that a change would be for the better. The region around Wallis Pond appealed to us the most. The woods there seemed wild enough to harbor numerous animals of value to the trapper, and we resolved to shift our line there for the remainder of the winter. At the foot of Big Averil our late enemies were operating, and unless we transferred our line as far from the camp as the beaver colony we did not know of any other likely place to trap in the whole region.

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an hour there was a perceptible lowering of the pond. Sass set two traps under the break and anchored them to stakes driven in deep water. Three days afterwards we found a dead beaver in one of them. He had been drowned entangled in the chain, which was wound tightly around him. Soon after this the weather became severe again; the pond froze, and our luck seemed to desert us. Whether the beavers became aware of our presence, or smelt danger, it was not possible for us to say. Very likely both of these reasons contributed to our ill success. At any rate we caught no more for some time. Being afraid of driving them off the brook altogether, we took up our traps and left the remainder of them to live in peace.

Our line had been transferred to the woods west of Wallis Pond, except the deadfalls in the Averil woods. These were left as they were. It was a large undertaking to build thirty or forty new log traps, especially in cold, rough weather, and Averil wood was a good and extensive trapping ground, as it lay between the various lakes and the mountains. We caught a number of mink around the shores of Wallis Pond during the mild weather, and a dozen or

more martens during the month of February. Lynxes were heard yowling off in the woods at times, but they were not numerous; we rarely saw their tracks, and did not succeed in trapping any.

We secured two fine specimens of the great horned owl by careful stalking among the dark hemlocks by daylight. They were known to lie up there. Once, Worth was attracted by the excited cawings of some crows, who occasionally ventured out of the sheltered woods to visit the ponds, and directed by their clamoring cries and wheeling flight around a big pine, he investigated, and saw sitting snugly on a branch in the semi-darkness a beautiful large white, or snowy owl. The bird, though not being able to see well by day, apparently heard something unusual going on below for he attempted to take wing just as Worth got near to him. He was shot. Sass skinned and stuffed him. We now had four handsome specimens of noble bird life of the north, viz.: the golden eagle, and the three owls. They were hard to get—much more so than the fur animals.

During early March signs of coming spring were plainly visible. The prevailing cold

winds from the north and west had dwindled into occasional blasts. In their stead were frequent soft and balmy airs, breathing over the frozen land from the far south. Trickling water was heard almost daily. At noonday we often went outdoors, bareheaded, and rejoiced in the warm sunshine that flooded the woods. But night had scarcely drawn a curtain over the scene when an abrupt change was apparent; the little rills became rigid; ice-covered Averil boomed, as usual, when anything uncommon came on the wind, such as extreme warmth or cold; and the glittering stars in the nightly skies of darkest blue twinkled with frosty clearness, like points of polished steel.

Sometimes a double line of flying black specks was visible in the sky by day, generally running to a point in front where some old gander, or drake, was engaged in piloting a family party to far northern picnic grounds. A change was coming—all nature knew it. We lived close to nature in those days and we felt its coming, too; and rejoiced.

One morning we saw approaching over the mushy ice on the lake a tall, lanky figure, dressed for the most part in skins, including a cap of

raccoon fur from which the animal's tail still dangled. He had snowshoes strapped to his back and carried a gun, and appeared to be dragging something behind him on the ice by a short leathern thong. When he got near we recognized him as one of the gang—one of the two husky brutes who had augmented the party when they attempted to attack the camp. He seemed friendly enough now. He held up his hand and waved it at us as he stepped on the shore, and gave his bundle a jerk ahead of him off the ice as he continued towards us. We stood watching him in silence. We did not fear him. Indeed, a most friendly smile was on the half-breed's face as he came on, still waving his arm in greeting. He showed very white teeth prominently in his black bearded face, and was not a bad-looking fellow after a dark, piratical fashion. The bundle consisted of a deer's hide fastened at the corners and it held something which he had been dragging along the trail.

"Bon jour, bon jour!" he said as he got close to us. "I hope you are well." He spoke pretty good English.

We replied that we were, and asked where his companions were. He said they were over

to the eastward, ten miles off. He was on an errand from them to us. Hauling the deerskin package forward he fumbled in his coat for a few moments, and then produced a folded piece of birch-tissue on which we found scrawled the following characteristic message:

MESSIEURS:

Acceptez, s'ilvous plait, de la peau de renard envoyée par le porteur, comme un leger signe de bonvouloir et de l'estime, de

Vos amis,

BEEL,

JEAN BA'TISTE LAPIERRE.

Worth understood enough French to translate this letter and read it to me and Sass. We were, to say the least, pleased to hear such friendly words as "good will," and "esteem," from our whilom foes. The "skin of a fox," referred to so casually, proved to be a magnificent silver-grey pelt which was worth, at the lowest calculation, about two hundred dollars. It was a royal present for poor backwoodsmen to make, and we were very much touched by their generosity. Our ministering care of the two wounded men had brought us grateful words, and a splendid token of appreciation. We felt

that we must make some return, but what it should be puzzled us. Bill's rifle was precious to him; that must be returned, and Sass could have my shotgun. We asked the Canadian if he would take back the gun and a few articles in addition. He signified his willingness to do so, and we made up a parcel containing all the luxuries we could spare, not much, but precious articles in the woods—some tea and sugar and a few potatoes, and wrapped them up in our only otter skin, which we enclosed in the deer skin drag. The Canuck shouldered Bill's rifle, slung his own over his back, and with a polite adieu, departed. This was the last we ever heard from the gang.

We left Averil Lakes on the 20th of March, after a light fall of snow on the 19th. The strong, but light sled, which we had captured from the invaders, was loaded with peltry. It made an imposing pile, strapped securely with deer thongs, and contained approximately the following articles:

45 Muskrat skins,
27 Martens,
3 Fishers,
1 Wolverine,

24 Minks,
3 Lynx,
4 Deer hides,
9 Beavers,
9 Grey squirrels,
1 Silver grey fox,
1 Golden eagle,
2 Great horned owls,
1 Snowy owl.

Sass was to receive one-third of the proceeds of these as soon as they should be sold. He protested against this arrangement but we were firm in making him an equal partner with us. He had been a faithful friend and of much assistance to us, and it was but just that he should share in our venture. We had taken up most of our traps, as Sass declared that he would not do much more trapping that season, but we left them at the camp for his use during the next fall. He said that he would remain at the camp until he heard from Mr. Butterfield, later in the spring. He hoped to get employment with the lumber gang which would begin cutting spruce that year.

Our parting with the old colored man was trying to us. We doubted if we should ever see him again. In fact we never did, but we heard

of him later on, and for a number of years as still living at the lakes in comparative comfort. He had secured steady employment as cook with the lumbermen, and afterwards at the marble quarry which was established there.

Our return journey through the woods occupied the best part of two days. We camped the first night in our old shack which we had erected to protect us from the rain on that fall night, now so long ago. The next afternoon we emerged into the pasture lot, opposite the farm and schoolhouse. How familiar and homelike everything looked. At the door of the school we drew up our sled, and halted. As it happened, school was in session, and on our looking through the window we were at once perceived by the little teacher, who came to greet us. We were objects of much curiosity to the school children. They crowded to the door and windows to see us. We must have presented a queer appearance. Our clothing was weather-stained and torn; boots gaping at the seams in places, and our faces tanned by wind and cold to a brick-red hue. Looking at Worth I perceived a strong growth of beard outlining his features, and my own unshaven face felt like an

old hair brush as I passed my hand over it. Such is self-consciousness aroused by the scrutiny of others, and of a pretty woman, in particular.

Our young friend welcomed us warmly, and eagerly inquired how we had fared. On being informed of the contents of the sled load she was highly delighted. She insisted on our remaining at the farmhouse for an hour or two, until she could prepare for us a good dinner. We remained there, and our brief stay with her and the kind people of the farm was a most pleasant one. She also inquired after Sass, and seemed much concerned when we told her he had been left alone at the camp. But we assured her that he was comfortable. Before leaving the farm we placed a small sum of money in her hands with which to purchase some supplies for him. She promised to send them in by the first team that went into the woods. We were informed that Mr. Butterfield had written to her that a party was going in about the first of April, and would include a man sent by him to examine and report on the marble deposit. Negotiations were already on foot to purchase the whole tract of land, and it only required a favorable

report to close the deal. This was good news for us. We bade farewell to the kind young woman, Worth lingered over this an unconscionable time while I waited in the road, and we then set out for East Corinth.

Here we put up for the night at the village hotel. We were very tired after our long tramp, and absolutely needed a rest. The following day we went by stage to Hallebury. Old Silas met us at the door of his store.

"Waal, I swan to man, haow are ye? Didn't never expect to see you two fools back agin, arter sech a turrible winter. Warn't ye mos' froze up there in the woods?"

We assured him that we had passed a very agreeable winter, and had kept as warm as we desired.

"How was the trappin'? Did ye git much peltry?" he asked.

We pointed to the pile of furs that was loaded on the back part of the stage, and his eyes bulged out at the sight.

"My stars, boys, ye did well. That's a right smart heap o' furs. An' that's your sled on top o' the stage? Waal, I knowed you'd hit it off all right. But, I declar', you boys hez got grit

to stay a hull winter alone among the mountings. Goin' to let me bid on them furs?" We said we would be glad to have an offer for them.

On leaving Silas's store we took the cars for Worth's home, and in a short time were at the house. We received a tearful welcome from Worth's mother. Four months had passed since we had left her door in the bright fall weather, and I suppose that her heart, during many a winter's storm, had gone out to us in our lonely wilderness home. Worth's sister gave us a joyful greeting. What a pretty girl she was, growing more so every day, I thought. I took the first occasion that offered to say to her that one of the finest silver-grey fox pelts ever taken out of the northern woods was in our sled load, and would make her a beautiful muff for the next winter. She clapped her hands with joy. The school-teacher was a very charming young woman but was not to be compared to this young creature—that was my judgment. Perhaps I was biased in this, however.

Old Silas came all the way to the house, after we had settled down to a hum-drum existence, and appraised our furs. Like a shrewd Vermont trader he disparaged our collection as a

preliminary, but furs bringing a good price that year he had ended by making an offer of three hundred dollars for the lot, which we accepted. Our bird skins were sent to Burlington, as Silas did not care to make a bid on them, and brought fifty dollars. We afterwards heard that the taxidermist, who bought them, realized twice as much, after he had prepared and mounted them.

Our marble cave brought us a small fortune. A company was formed to work it, after a report had been received and the land bought, and Mr. Butterfield offered us our choice of shares in the company, or five thousand dollars apiece in cash, in lieu of further interest in the business. We elected to take the cash. With my share I purchased a good farm a few miles from Worth's house and there made my future home, having no taste for life in the cities. Sass received his share of the fur money, also five hundred dollars of the marble award from us. What he did with it was known only to himself.

Kind readers, who have followed so far our humble fortunes, I bid you a respectful farewell.

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